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LETTERS & ARTS

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The Ingersoll Prizes 1984

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COMMENT

The recipients of the 1984 Ingersoll Prizes are Anthony Powell and Russell Kirk. The T. S. Eliot prize goes to Mr. Powell, and the Richard Weaver prize goes to Dr. Kirk.

Anthony Powell

The serious novel has undergone a radical transformation in the 20th century. The old narrative forms that had given pleasure to a large reading public were gradually replaced by literary experiments whose appeal was restricted, by and large, to a readership of critics, teachers, and the authors themselves. The greatest exception to this trend has been the English novel. English fiction of the past 50 years has been dominated by writers who were able to absorb the new techniques without abandoning the old objectives of narrative literature: instruction and entertainment. This quality of serious entertainment is present in the works of such varied novelists as Evelyn Waugh, William Gerhardie, George Orwell, Graham Greene, and above all, Anthony Powell.

In a career that has spanned five decades, Anthony Powell has established himself as one of the most important English novelists of the 20th century. Born December 21, 1905, in London, Powell was educated at Eton and Oxford (B.A. 1926, M.A. 1944). After leaving Oxford, he entered the publishing firm of Gerald Duckworth & Co., where he remained until 1936. In World War II Powell served in Military Intelligence as a liaison officer between the British Army and the Allies under German occupation.

Powell's first novel, *Afternoon Men* (1931), was favorably received by the critics, notably Edith Sitwell who praised the author for his depiction of the "bright young people" of the 20's. His reputation grew steadily with the publication of four other pre-war novels: *Venusberg* (1932), *From a View to a Death* (1933), *Agents and Patients* (1936), and *What's Become of Waring?* (1939). After the interruption of the war years, Powell resumed his active literary career. *John Aubrey and His Friends,* a study of the life and times of the 17th-century biographer and antiquarian, was issued in 1948. His praise for Aubrey's "appreciation of the oddness of the individual human being" could just as well be applied to Powell's own work.

It was not until 1951 that he published *A Question of Upbringing,* the first volume of his *A Dance to the Music of Time.* All 12 volumes of this modern masterpiece appeared between 1951 and 1975 to great critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic.

The novel chronicles the life of Nicholas Jenkins—his school days, career in publishing, service in World War II, and growing success as a novelist. While the parallels with Powell's life make it an undoubtedly autobiographical work, it is not, as it is frequently treated, a *roman à clef.* The author has not shrunk from being identified as a Proustian novelist. On the contrary, he has gone out of his way to invite the comparison. Not only does he acknowledge his affection for Proust in his memoirs, but in a famous passage of *The Military Philosophers* (volume 9) Major Jenkins unwittingly spends a night in Cabourg—Proust's Balbec. When he recognizes the location, the narrator is transported into a Proustian reverie and reflects on "the eternal failure of human life to respond a hundred per cent; to rise to the greatest heights without allowing at the same time some suggestion, however slight, to take shape in indication that things could have been even better."

The same elegiac resignation that marks so much of Proust's novel runs like a repeated musical phrase through all 12 volumes, but unlike his literary predecessor Powell does not find a mystical transfiguration in the act of recollection or even in the life of the artist. Instead, we are left with a contemplation of the not quite infinite variety of human experience—of life itself as it is lived, neither a dream nor a nightmare—and in the end "the formal measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the wintry silence."

Among American readers *The Music of Time* is particularly esteemed as a chronicle of the upper (and educated) classes in Britain. The work begins in the Edwardian afterglow of the Victorian era: a world of social and moral certainties—at least in a child's eyes. Inexorably, volume by volume, those certainties yield to the pressures of modern times. It is a world of bright young men of promise who come to nothing, and of pushing young particles who make their way. Powell, as much as Proust, is the historian of a vanishing civilization and of a social order on the verge of extinction.

The American upper classes have long ago begun their own dance. The past 30 years have witnessed a social transformation in America less devastating, perhaps, but no less pronounced than what has taken place in Britain. The proletarianization of social life—of colleges and clubs—has, it is true, gone into remission in recent years. Even so, it is hard to deny that the American ruling class is exhibiting the same failure of will that marked the end of an empire on which the sun once never set. To the extent that there is a vital American culture and a determination not to be displaced from the world's stage, it is to be found not in the remnants of an older aristocracy but in the working classes and the new elites of technologists and professionals. But Pareto's theory of circulating elites will bring small comfort to the decent old American families, whose ancestors once made a revolution and who still manage to maintain something of the original sense of this American experiment. We will survive their passing. Factories will be managed just as well; television programs will be produced; the sick will be healed, the poor

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Russell Kirk

To anyone who believes that conservatism consists of standing pat, the career of Russell Amos Kirk stands as a contradiction. For in championing Burkean, organic conservatism, Dr. Kirk has, ironically, vigorously challenged the status quo in ways few could have foreseen 35 years ago. By the early 1950's the dominant modes of thought were stagnant. "Liberal prejudices," Kirk observes, "—either old-style Manchesterian liberalism or new-style collectivistic liberalism—h[ad] dominated our climate of opinion for a great while." In 1950 Lionel Trilling concluded in *The Liberal Imagination* that such liberal thought was effete, yet he doubted that any other mode of thinking could soon challenge its hegemony. Kirk's 1953 publication of *The Conservative Mind,* therefore, came as a daring and unforeseen assault upon the received patterns of American intellectual opinion. As Gordon Keith Chalmers conceded in his review of the book in the *New York Times,* Kirk offered a totally "unfamiliar" perspective on "controversies which usually, in our lifetime, have been illuminated by a searchlight from the left."

Unlike many who call themselves "conservative," Kirk has understood from the first that vital conservatism must be far more than an unreflective effort to preserve all existing institutions and practices. The modern world, after all, was "a world smudged by industrialism, standardized by the masses, consolidated by government; a world crippled by war, trembling between the colossi of East and West, and peering over a smashed barricade into the gulf of dissolution." Unquestionably, mere preservation was not enough; the times demanded change. But change is usually destructive and only beneficial when guided by what Kirk calls "the lamp of experience." Fuel for such a lamp was perilously scarce in mid-20th-century America. Conservatism, inasmuch as it survived at all, was largely a movement of chamber-of-commerce boosterism and political sloganeering. By drawing upon the neglected "men of ideas," Kirk set about restoring substance and influence to conservatism. But, in revivifying the intellectual tradition of English-speaking conservatism, he surprised many Americans who thought they were already conversant with that tradition. It was a novel proposition for Kirk to suggest that serious American conservatives must come to terms not only with John Adams, John Randolph, John Calhoun, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Edmund Burke, but also with Catholic and Anglo-Catholic theologians like Coleridge and Newman, with cultural critics such as George Santayana and Irving Babbitt, and with creative writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Robert Frost, and T. S. Eliot. Indeed, his "program" for American conservatism tended "to bewilder a good many people," especially those who wanted a "neat system of positive law" rather than philosophic inquiry. Kirk recognized, however, that only such inquiry could budge conservatism out of its deadening fixation upon strictly political programs. In works such as *The American Cause* (1957), *Political Principles of Robert A. Taft* (1967), and *Roots of American Order* (1974), and in numerous popular and scholarly essays, he has himself offered political observations, but always within a framework of thought not reducible to political terms. "Society's regeneration," he has long maintained, "cannot be an undertaking wholly political." Such regeneration requires as well the "vision of the poets." Understanding and sharing that vision is the task to which Dr. Kirk has dedicated his life.

Introduced by his mother to "Lewis Carroll and Stevenson and Scott and Grimm and the adventures of the noble company of the Table Round," Dr. Kirk early came to value literature as "a mighty prop to health of mind." His childhood years spent in Plymouth, Michigan (where he was born on Oct. 19, 1918), were filled with books— Dickens, Twain, Hugo, and Hawthorne —often discussed with his maternal grandfather in his study or during long walks. He pursued his literary studies at Michigan

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Yeats: A Second Coming

W. B. Yeats: The Poems; Edited by Richard J. Finneran; Macmillan; New York.

by Ronald Berman

When Yeats died in 1939 his poetry had not been completely collected and there was some doubt over the right text. His widow was involved in the editing of his work and she had strong and sometimes wrong ideas about its form and content. The result was the book till now in general use, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats.* This was not the last word in editing, but it was a handy volume of less than 500 pages. It contained the poems and not much else. There was no apparatus—no explanation of either the editing or the meaning of the poems.

The Collected Poems have now been replaced by *W. B. Yeats: The Poems* from the same publisher. This is a much more consequential volume, about half again as thick as the one before it. It is less of a joy to read but it has advantages. There is a preface and 100 pages of textual and explanatory notes. More important, it makes significant changes in form and content. The main points about the new edition are:

—It works from selected copy-texts of Yeats. Finneran, the editor, has explained his methods in a previous book, *Editing Yeats's Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

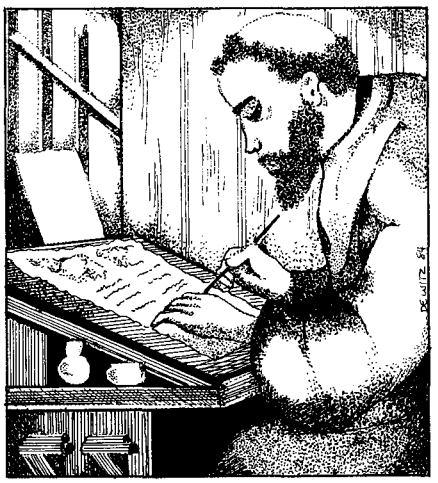
—It changes the punctuation and restricts emendation.

—It reorganizes the verse, taking its initiative from what the editor describes as "a manuscript table of contents for a volume of poems and plays projected by Yeats when he died."

—It adds verse previously excluded from collection.

—In a separate section it includes "new" poems: that is, poems until now published only in Yeats's separate essays, stories, and plays.

It will be confusing but worthwhile to manage the transition from one edition to another, and to update books based on the old arrangement like the invaluable *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* by A. Norman Jeffares. But, between Jeffares's *Commentary* and the explanatory notes in the new volume, most readers will be able to feel their way comfortably. The *Commentary* has critical notes while the new edition, working in tandem with it, explains all direct allusions.



That Yeats is important as more than a versifier is clear. I write this with today's *New York Times* on my desk, its lead editorial on global terrorism ending with an invocation of Yeats's "poetic forebodings" about our age and with a citation from "The Second Coming." There is evidently something in Yeats which makes him more than an official poet of the 20th century, something which corresponds to our sense of actuality. That is strange, because Yeats was famously irrational. He was often silly, sometimes mystical, a believer from time to time in spiritualism. What does a man who has faith in gyres, spheres, and Madame Blavatsky have to do with the editorial page of the *New York Times?*

We might begin by recalling that there were four great Irishmen of approximately the same generation: Wilde, Shaw, Joyce, and Yeats. Shaw, who was the cleverest, although with the lightest specific gravity, might have been thought to have the best sense of historical actuality. His work is a constant assessment of the world's customs, and a more or less continuous round of advice on setting them right. But people seem not to consult Shaw's pages as they once did Virgil's. It turns out that the two most obscure and symbolical of the group, who best knew the uses of silence, have had more to say than the student of economic reform. Every now and then, as in the epilogue to *Saint Joan,* Shaw would come to grips with things. He would take off the kid gloves and admit that nothing—not enlightenment or education or Fabian socialism—could meliorate the way we were. But, for the most part, he wrote about the social situation improved by remedial doses of Beatrice Webb. This is well and good, but for us Shaw is Rex Harrison.

Yeats was more mysterious than the others and the way through his work is through zodiacs and revelations. But once accepted, his modes seem to serve as no more of a barrier than the distant fervor of Botticelli or the Platonism of Michelangelo. But there is one barrier to Yeats, consisting of neither form nor style. Here it is, from "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen":

> Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
> Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
> Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,

Dr. Berman is with the department of literature at the University of California, San Diego.

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To crawl in her own blood, and go
scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

This is much less decorous than "The Second Coming," and much less likely to appear in the *Times* as an authorized commentary on the human self. It is much less likely to win the approval of the mind of the late 20th century. The barrier in his poetry is not symbolism or spiritualism; it is opinion.

The difference between Yeats and his current audience—between Pound and Eliot and Hemingway and Conrad and the modern audience—is that all these writers believe things self-evidently which are no longer generally believed. The bland rationalism typified by Shaw is now regnant, even though we quote Yeats from time to time.

In one of the good books about Yeats, Richard Ellmann *(The Identity of Yeats)* says that one of the great themes of his work is the opposition of Asiatic to European civilization, the faceless and formless against (literally) sculptured forms of individual identity. Hence the importance in his work of the nonlively arts: architecture, painting, and sculpture. These things show what Yeats calls,

The self-sown, self-begotten shape
that gives
Athenian intellect its mastery.

It is the "intellect" which is so large a subject in his verse: the play of mind over experience. Always in Yeats the exercise of mind is toward consciousness, informed by discipline, and easy to anger. That is one of the reasons why he links it to the vocabulary of art. Throughout the poems we find words like "order" and "shape" and "art" itself—the discipline of which goes against our grain. And his conception of public beliefs goes violently against the sentimentalism that now passes so widely for liberal thought:

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has
made
In art or politics.

This is not of much use in a campaign, except, perhaps, for someone like Eugene McCarthy. When the *Times* invokes "The Second Coming," with its brute beast slouching towards Bethlehem to be born, it does so with the unquestioned belief that something has gone wrong and ought to be set right. It is Shavian in its tropistic responses to things. But in that poem and in the 1919 poem Yeats was not saying that things have gone wrong—only that that was the way things were. He may be the only major poet ever to have given so much thought to politics, and politics for him was not the expression of universalistic hope. It was the manifestation of a view of character that made even Freud's seem optimistic.

The political poetry of Yeats is dominated by hatred and failure. It is not only that Parnell dies and Maud Gonne becomes a fanatic hag and Yeats himself declines into a 60-year-old smiling public man. He has a theory that, upon closer consideration, the *Times* will never like. Here is the note from the new edition on one of the most familiar of the poems:

I wrote Leda and the Swan because the editor of a political review asked me for a poem. I thought, 'After the individualist, demagogic movement, founded by Hobbes and popularized by the Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution, we have a soil so exhausted that it cannot grow that crop again for centuries.' Then I thought, 'Nothing is now possible but some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation.'

**Caveat lector.* Yeats goes on to say: "My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem; but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friend tells me that his conservative readers would misunderstand the poem."

So that there is again the thing that Lionel Trilling, in one of his last books, called the problem of looking into the abyss. Taking the Modernists for credit may mean satisfying the eternal American desire to have the world correspond with one's self—but it may also mean the recognition, late for all Americans, never for some, that our best modern writers are out of tune. They are not optimists or rationalists; they don't believe in psychiatry: Yeats was not the

In the Mail

***Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension, 1918-1941* edited by Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens; Syracuse University Press; Syracuse, NY.** Argues that various social tensions arose as a result of the proliferation of mass media—movies, TV, newspapers, and books like this.

***Joseph Conrad's Bible* by Dwight H. Purdy; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, OK.** As part of the dust jacket information puts it, "The author reveals Conrad's reliance on scriptural metaphors that escape the modernist reader who does not know the Bible." Said reader would be better off with a primary, not a tertiary, text, we think.

***The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* by Joseph J. Corn; Oxford University Press; New York.** Once, not so many years ago, it was anticipated that the advent of aircraft would "usher in the millennium." Reality set in. Now we have nothing more exotic than flying buses.

***Fugitive Industry: The Economics and Politics of Deindustrialization* by Richard B. McKenzie; Ballinger; Cambridge, MA.** A sensible book about plant closings. Makes you think that more people ought to be opening moving companies.

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only one of them to believe in revelations if we are to go by recent biographical works on the most intelligent and balanced of them, T. S. Eliot. It seems he did not invent some of the nightmare scenes from *The Waste Land* but that he experienced them. But perhaps one might consult one of the best things ever said about irrational ways of reaching rational conclusions—in Shaw's preface to *Saint Joan.*

It's hard to deal with a writer of this magnitude in a review—perhaps one can only say that this fine edition reminds us now of how accessible Yeats is. The gyres and zodiacs seem not to matter so much. But Yeats has even foreseen our conversion to his ways, and warned us against making good editions of his work and understanding it:

> Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
> Old, learned, respectable bald heads
> Edit and annotate the lines
> That young men, tossing on their beds,
> Rhymed out in love's despair
> To flatter beauty's ignorant ear. □

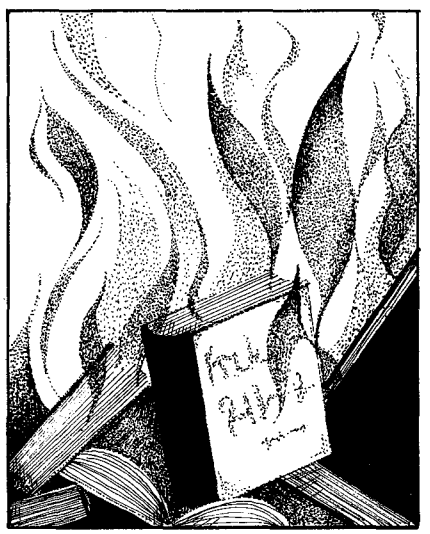
The Radical Virus

Tom Schachtman: *Decade of Shocks: Dallas to Watergate, 1963-1974;* Poseidon Press; New York.

Allen J. Matusow: *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960's;* Harper & Row; New York.

by James J. Thompson Jr.

Pity the lot of the American radical of recent vintage. Never does the opportunity arise for him to spill his blood on the barricades and to die with the words *vive la liberté* (or whatever one says in English) on his lips. Uncooperative authorities refuse to drag him before a firing squad or even to immure him in a dank prison. He longs for a Dostoevskian world of steely-eyed inquisitors and brutal repression but finds instead, to his chagrin and embarrassment, that in America he suffers no ill consequences, bears no distinguishing marks of persecution, labors under no disabilities. Sometimes, as with Robert Lowell and Dwight MacDonald in the *ópera bouffe* march on the Pentagon of 1967, he cannot even manage to get himself arrested. The radical faces an exquisite fate: after hurling his (usually metaphorical) bombs into the crowded streets and growing bored with playing at revolution, he can retire from the field to enjoy with impunity the perquisites and privileges of the society he despises. How true the mordant quip of the 1960's: Scratch a radical and find a Porsche owner! In America old radicals do not fade away—they become lawyers, journalists, government bureaucrats, professors, and, in the most piquant irony of all, highly successful Wall Street brokers.



Although yesterday's hippies, yippies, and assorted protesters of every hue and color live prosperously and contentedly these days, they pine for the brio and zest that gave a razor's edge to their lives in the 1960's. For Tom Schachtman, author of *Decade of Shocks*, "it was the time in our lives when we felt the most alive. We had a cause, its name was freedom, and to fight in its service with like-minded comrades was ennobling and all-consuming; we knew the passion of life." The demands and burdens of marriage, children, and career prevent these aging freedom fighters from reenacting the battles of their youth, but they can at least invest the 60's with enough myth and legend to fill their reveries for the rest of their days. They will never completely recover from the virus they contracted 20 years ago; to quote Mr. Schachtman again, "The time remains a touchstone, a benchmark to which we compare all our later experiences and sensations."

The left never tires of mocking conservatives for clinging to the gossamer glories of a past that never existed. To the contrary, the conservative loves the past for its quotidian reality, its concreteness and palpability, its practical wisdom that arises out of the experiences of countless men and women who have loved and hated, sorrowed and rejoiced, lived and died. The conservative needs no mythic or legendary past to sustain him, but his antagonists do; for all their prattle about the future, leftists prefer to escape the frustrations of the present by retreating imaginatively into a golden age of the past. In the 1920's beleaguered radicals cherished memories of those intoxicating days before World War I when Max Eastman, John Reed, Randolph Bourne, *The Masses* and the swirling excitement of Greenwich Village had seemed to herald the onset of an age of sexual liberation, cultural experimentation, and political innovation. Radicals of the 1950's warded off the malaise induced by McCarthyism by recalling (with a wistful smile of half-remembered sin) the hope and ebullience of the 1930's, an era that had promised the creation of a new man fit to inherit the secular New Jerusalem that was fast abuilding. The 1960's have now supplanted these earlier times as the favorite repository of leftist myth and legend; the decade is the new golden age, a time of

Dr. Thompson writes from Nashville, TN.

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idealism and good deeds that saw blacks freed, poverty rediscovered, women awakened, sexual inhibitions cast off, a war machine foiled, and an evil president toppled.

It profits one little to decry the mythmaking process; the left will have its myths and the flood of memoirs, novels, journalistic accounts, and pseudo-histories of the 60's will not recede until the left has either exhausted itself in an orgy of nostalgia or a new era of radicalism arrives to supply fresh grist for the mythmaking mill. Nor is much accomplished by railing against the idiots and idiocies of the 60's; it has been done so often that even the cleverest terms of abuse have degenerated into clichés. The best way to counter the mythmakers would seem to lie in a strategy that rejects the received wisdom of the left —and the right as well— and formulates new perspectives on the men, movements, and issues of the 60's. By dint of his willingness to scorn worn platitudes and to violate prescribed ways of interpreting the decade, Allen J. Matusow provides in *The Unraveling of America* a start in this direction. Though himself a historian of left-of-center sympathies, Professor Matusow trenchantly exposes the failures of liberalism in the 60's and scores those further to the left for their willingness during the decade to engage in cheap talk and mindless violence. In a turn of affairs rare among American historians, Professor Matusow admits the cogency of the conservatives' attack on the liberal program of the 60's.

As one reconsiders the decade, with Professor Matusow's book as guide, a curious thing occurs: much of the animosity one formerly felt for that benighted era dissipates and in its place comes a piercing sadness over what happened to our nation in the 60's. There is much to evoke this melancholy: that the idealism of the young flowed into often ignoble causes and fed the self-aggrandizing fantasies of mendacious leaders; that America wasted its substance on an ill-begotten Asian war; that the tumult and strife of the decade erected walls of incomprehension and rancor between young and old, black and white, blue-collar worker and college student; that the rampaging mobs of Watts, Newark, and Detroit betrayed the quest of blacks for equal rights under the law; that the capricious politics of the late 60's destroyed such a decent and honorable man as Hubert Humphrey; that the old and distinguished Democratic party—the party of Andrew Jackson, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman—staggered into the 1970's under the lash of fanatics; and finally and most tragically, that assassins' bullets cut down three beloved leaders.

Out of a contemplation of all this chaos there arises one of those tantalizing "what-if" questions that students of history love to toy with: What if Robert Kennedy had eluded his assassin and through the vicissitudes of democratic politics had swept on to the White House? Might it be possible that such an eventuality would have provided a more satisfactory denouement to that convulsive decade? Make no mistake: by 1968 Robert Kennedy had moved to the left of most American politicians; one does not essay to argue that Kennedy was a con-

CONFLUENCES

From Dewey to Huey

To a superficial observer, philosophers seem like people who inconsequentially spin their idle theories in their ivory towers while the *real* world blithely goes its own way. The truth is otherwise. Aristotelian thought, refurbished and reshaped by medieval Thomists, for centuries governed life in Western Europe far more pervasively than did any of the "absolute" monarchs who ruled during the period. More relevant to the American experience is that fact that two European philosophers, Locke and Montesquieu, probably did as much to shape the Constitution as did any man alive in 1787. And in 20th-century America, the millions who have taken "Will it work?" as the highest measure of truth are, consciously or unconsciously, under the philosophical spell of William James and his disciple John Dewey.

Indeed, Charles R. Morris convincingly demonstrates in *A Time of Passion: America, 1960-1980* (Bessie/Harper & Row; New York) that the pragmatism that largely determined American policy in the 1960's owed as much to these two philosophers as it did to Kennedy, Johnson, or any of their living advisers. Such pragmatism fostered almost unbounded confidence among government leaders in the power of management techniques, social science expertise, and potent weaponry to banish poverty and inequity at home and to contain communism abroad. "Neither people, the economy, nor other nations," Morris observes, "were so plastic as they hoped." Further, because it subordinated ends to means, pragmatism lacked the "moral resonance" necessary to combat the barbarities of a Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, or Huey Newton.

Regrettably, Morris concludes a generally praiseworthy book with a facile prediction, based on little more than demographic patterns, of a new period of social stability and moral integrity. His own study provides too much evidence that men and nations may grow into middle-age and beyond without attaining moral wisdom if they are suckled on immature philosophy. (BC) □

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servative *malgré lui.* Still one wonders if he might not have been what America needed most at that decade's end. Though his detractors denied it (and the number of Bobby-haters was—and is—multitudinous), the Robert Kennedy who died in Los Angeles was a different man from the brash, arrogant, abrasive, and (to concede his enemies' favorite derogatory term) ruthless Attorney General of 1961. He had matured and had expanded his vision; he had discovered new depths within himself and new ways of viewing the world beyond himself. He had come to understand the words of his favorite dramatist, Aeschylus: "He who learns must suffer." Bobby Kennedy suffered much and learned much during the 1960's; he died too young to attain the full wisdom that Aeschylus promised to those who suffer greatly.

What might Robert Kennedy have accomplished as president? Perhaps he could have mitigated the hostility between blacks and whites, for as he proved in the Indiana Democratic primary of 1968, no other politician—Democrat or Republican, black or white, liberal or conservative—could bestir both ghetto blacks and blue-collar workers to a pitch of political fervor. He most likely would have brought the war in Vietnam to a swift conclusion, an act that would have saved lives (both American and Vietnamese), averted the further alienation of the young, and calmed the boiling waters of national controversy. His unusual blend of tough-mindedness and fierce compassion would have enabled him to aid the poor while sparing him (and us) the fatuity that often passes for social consciousness among liberals. Because of his devout Roman Catholicism it is unlikely that he would have looked benignly upon the abortion rights movement or that he would have condoned the destructive political programs of homosexuals and feminists. Finally, a Kennedy Presidency would have spared us many of the most disquieting consequences of the 60's: the triumph of the McGovernites within the Democratic party, the further ravaging of trust in public authority, Watergate and its attendant sordidness, the bootless and lackluster administrations of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. To speak favorably of Bobby Kennedy ranks among conservatives as a crime against nature; but before summoning the ideological constabulary, one should note President Reagan's admiration for another man once hated by the right, Harry Truman. The pursuit of what is best for one's country makes at times for strange bedfellows and surprising ironies. □

Reality by the Tail

Luisa Valenzuela: *The Lizard's Tail;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Stephen L. Tanner

The Lizard's Tail reflects two important tendencies in Latin American fiction. One is a sense of obligation to make social and political commentary. Few Latin American writers escape the pressures to be active participants in the solution of economic, political, and cultural problems. As the Peruvian writer Mario Vargos Llosa remarked in explaining such pressures, "To be an artist, only an artist, can become, in our countries, a kind of moral crime, a political sin."

The other tendency, often in tension with the first, is toward experimentation in narrative technique. It is essentially an aesthetic impulse leading to a preoccupation with fantasy and magic. Style takes precedence over content, imaginative recreation of reality over imitation of reality, and the vision becomes increasingly subjective and idiosyncratic. "Magical realism" is the term used to denote some of this fiction.

Because the pressures toward social and political commitment are so strong for Latin American writers, aesthetic experimentation, fantasy and magic are often not procedures for escaping social reality; on the contrary, they become a vehicle for exposing social and political evils. This appears to be what Valenzuela was attempting in *The Lizard's Tail.*

The novel is a fantasized biography of López Rega, Isabel Perón's Minister of Social Well-Being, who apparently governed through sorcery. Valenzuela's character is simply known as the Sorcerer or Witchdoc. He has set up his own peculiar kingdom in the interior of the country, which we assume is Argentina. The military government tolerates him because he oversees a profitable cocaine-processing plant it has installed in his domain and because it respects his diabolical genius and ability to control people by exploiting fear and magic. The novel relates the Sorcerer's childhood, how he became involved in magic, how he came to power, how he was overthrown by the military and how he plans to regain power.

His plan to obtain power is bizarre to say the least. And it is not just national power he craves. Like some sort of comic strip villain, he lusts for power without bounds: "To rule the world is the only possible voluptuousness. The great cosmic orgasm." Here is his plan. He happens to have three testicles, one of which he believes is his sister, who he calls Estrella. He intends to have a son by that sister, a son who will come to rule the world. Mother, father, and son will all be he alone. It is the consummate egomaniacal fantasy. The reader cannot be blamed for puzzling over the physiological details of this extraordinary conception and birth because the Sorcerer himself is similarly curious. But with the aid of magic and hormones the testicle

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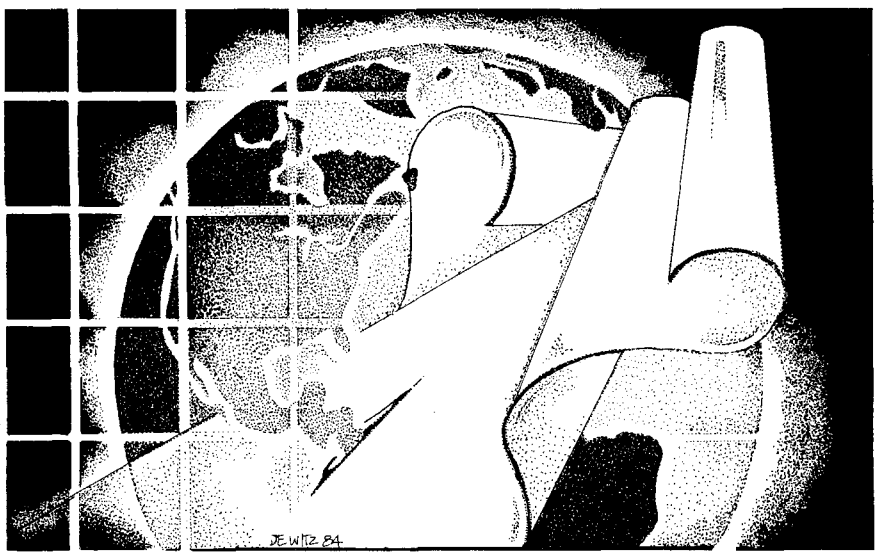
does become pregnant and the novel ends with an explosion of blood from the Sorcerer's bed which presumably signals the birth.

The Sorcerer is not simply a run-of-the-mill villain. His gustatory pleasures include eating newborn infants served with apples in their mouths and having his eunuch aide urinate in his mouth. He has a penchant for dismemberment. He saves a sawed-off foot as a trophy, decapitates drowned bodies, and amputates a young woman's finger because he happens to need one to further his plans. He takes pride in his torture skills and dreams of new and refined methods. His manual of torture, used by the military government, was the product of much experience, beginning in his youth with the unimaginative practice of dabbing the victim with honey and staking him to an anthill. For sexual thrills he likes to lash maidens with a leather whip called the lizard's tail, and he delights in sodomy. He takes visual pleasure in pecked skulls and seeing brains fly when a bullet enters a human head. As a boy he watched contentedly as a body was eaten by scavengers, a body which happened to be his father's. He daydreams of such things as using a straw to sip blood from a maiden's jugular, wrenching the bowels from his enemies, and inventing a solution that would dissolve uteri, thereby solving the overpopulation problem and making war a pleasure, not a necessity. Valenzuela has a fertile imagination and no compunctions when it comes to horrors, sadomasochism, and scatology.

The military leaders are as evil as the Sorcerer. They simply lack his genius for wickedness. He has weapons they lack, weapons of the spirit. For this reason they try to use him in their exploitation of superstition. Like the Sorcerer, they abhor doubt: "Doubt has to be eradicated by decree. There's no room for doubt in history." The plan for "National Reconstruction" requires that "the authoritarian tradition" and martial values be infused into all areas of national life. The generals find inflation and undernourishment desirable as a means of subjugating the people. In addition to trafficking in cocaine, they raise taxes in order to buy new weapons, which please them the way toys please little boys. They make people disappear, torture babies in front of their parents to make the parents confess, and beat pregnant women until they miscarry. The dust jacket refers to this portrait of the generals as "piercingly accurate."

The author thrusts herself into the story in the second of its three parts, which begins, "I, Luisa Valenzuela, swear by these writings that I will try to do something about all this, become involved as much as possible, plunge in head-first, aware of how little can be done but with a desire to handle at least a small thread and assume responsibility for the story." She says the Sorcerer is writing a novel that superimposes itself on hers and is capable of nullifying it. She feels her story slipping from her hands, taken over by him. This begins a pattern of clever narrative games in which the author is absorbed into the events of her own story. She is the creator of it and yet unable to control it. She self-consciously mentions that she is inventing this biography, but then claims that the Sorcerer is taking control and doing the writing: "There's an affinity in the voice as I narrate him, sometimes our pages are indistinguishable." Perhaps she would have us believe that the Sorcerer represents a dark side in all of us. In any case, she wonders why fiction and reality get so entwined within her, or at least within her writing, why she can't keep them separate. She is alarmed that she must compete with the Sorcerer in telling the story because he invents more skillfully. She considers killing him off with a stroke of the pen but cannot bring herself to do it: "He's our reverse face, the dark side of our struggle. The arouser. I couldn't kill him if I wanted to, and I hate him for that reason, too."



Valenzuela is obviously more interested in experimenting with narrative than in making a telling criticism of political corruption and social injustice. She is fascinated with what can happen when the barrier between fiction and reality is eliminated and when meaning in both realms becomes indeterminate. She is clearly influenced by radical versions of contemporary literary theory. Apparently as a way of tipping us off about this she sprinkles a couple of short chapters with terms from recent critical

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CONFLUENCES

Pathetic Comedy

At one time it was well understood that comedy required a religious underpinning. To Dante, the modern addition of the word *Divine* to the original title (*Commedia*) of his cosmic epic would seem superfluous. To him and most of his contemporaries it was obvious that without God no narrative could ever end joyfully; there could be no *un*divine comedy. Since Dante, however, poets, authors, and dramatists have often constructed comedies which exclude the transcendent. While a beguiling charm still surrounds the Shakespearean romp or the Victorian marriage comedy, it is hard in the late 20th century to believe that marital union happily resolves all human problems. The high old sense of *comedy,* now largely replaced by the trivial modern one of "funny story," cannot be refurbished without a reintroduction of Deity into literature.

In *The Gods, the Little Guys and the Police* (Harper & Row; New York), the Argentinian writer Humberto Costantini seeks to again make the divine a major element in literary comedy. Unfortunately, Mr. Constantini's supramundane realm consists merely of petty and ineffectual Greek gods who survey the goings on of an Argentinian poetry circle threatened in the mid 70's with massacre by brutal parapolice. Drawn with a playful lightness of touch, these deities are the most amusing part of the absurd drama, which ends "happily" when the poetry devotees are spared, but 12 other innocent people are murdered in their stead. Costantini's mythical machinery is part of a "black comedy," meant to satirize Latin American parapolice as foolish but bloody agents of Hades. But on a higher level the work seeks to deify the "little guys" who are "little parading monkeys, yes, but suddenly men, resembling gods, and suddenly gods." What Costantini fails to realize is that when the gods themselves are reduced to laughable dimensions, everything else, including humans and human suffering, is trivialized not apotheosized. The result is not high comedy, merely a dismal joke. □

theory. The opponents of the government feel a need to "deconstruct the textuality inscribed in the para-official discourse." They refer to Umberto Eco's quotation of Warren Weaver's notion that "the words *information* and *uncertainty* are intimately interrelated." They bewail their lack of "interstitial freedom." In short, Valenzuela calls our attention to the fact that she is providing a "chain of signifiers" and invites us to ponder the metaphorical nature not only of the characters and events in the novel but also of the process of its composition.

A basic assumption in all this is that reality and fiction are essentially indistinguishable. For example, Valenzuela receives an invitation from the Sorcerer to attend a masked ball. She first remarks that he shouldn't even know she exists (after all, he is a character she has created) and then says, "I'm not going, and maybe the masked ball I will describe will be more exact than the real thing, or maybe the Sorcerer will decide to write his own story of the party, or we will find out through some unsuspected source what really will happen and maybe that will turn out to be the least informative of all." In the world of this novel nothing is determinate.

If this is the case, is it possible for literature to influence actual life? Valenzuela raises this question but provides no clear answer. At one point she is disgusted with herself "for believing that literature can save us, for doubting that literature can save us, all that bullshit." At the end of the long middle section, which begins with, "I, Luisa Valenzuela, swear" and ends with her signature, she curses the pain and futility of writing while, nearby, innocent people are being tortured and killed. She speaks of planting the written word that maybe will serve her as seed someday. Then, in a bewildering ceremony, she says she abandons the pen, thereby abandoning the Sorcerer to his fate. By being silent she can make him silent.

But in fact he is not silenced, for the following section begins with him saying, "How well I feel today," and the story goes on.

The novel is fascinating in certain ways. The Sorcerer calls himself "the great syncretizer" and exploits the magic traditions of a number of countries and ages. Even his enemies, including the author herself, combat him with magic. This treatment of magic, especially magic as a vehicle for obtaining power and manipulating others is intriguing. Likewise, the ingenious narrative games stretch our imagination and stimulate our thinking about the fictional process.

Ultimately, however, the novel is unsatisfying because its elements work against each other. The clever narrative ploys that blur the distinctions between the real and fictitious and establish the uncertainty of all information eventually undercut the social and political commentary and satire. The exaggerated evil of the Sorcerer and the military government diminishes the subtlety and consequently the force of the satire, but beyond this, the emphasis upon the indeterminacy and fictiveness of everything precludes the possibility of a satiric norm. Within the context of such philosophical-aesthetic play both good and evil lose their significance. It is impossible to take such an extravagant caricature as the Sorcerer seriously, particularly when the author reminds us along

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the way that he is pure invention and her choices of incident and characterization are sometimes arbitrary. And by the same token, it is difficult to take seriously the love interest in the story or the plight of the victimized people and their hopes for the future.

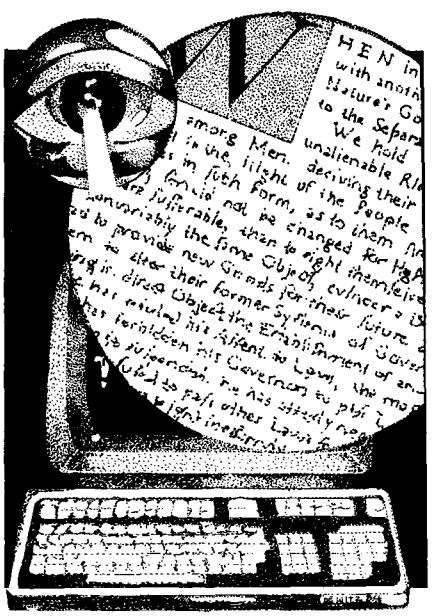
In short, Valenzuela tries to have it both ways. Under the guise of serious literary treatment of the social-political problems of her country, she indulges her appetite for faddish philosophical-aesthetic playfulness. It is not a successful mix.

The Lizard's Tail can be seen as a test case for how certain versions of post-structuralist theory can be applied in the creation of a novel. The renunciation of traditional conventions, the heady if perverse freedom supplied by the notions of indeterminacy and uncertainty and the ensuing latitude for subjective aesthetic play allow for exciting and original effects. But when that irradicable human impulse to use literature to comment on life arises, as it inevitably does, the author must recognize that she has undermined all grounds for credibility and significance. □

Wrangling with Words

Denis Donoghue: *The Arts Without Mystery;* Little, Brown; Boston.

by Gary S. Vasilash



Jacques Derrida, maître of the critical school of deconstruction, writes of his *Of Grammatology,* "writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos." As Derrida notes, Plato, in *Phaedrus,* speaks of the inferiority of writing, and Derrida shows that since then the oral form has been considered to be superior, more authentic. Speech is unmediated: from the mouth of the speaker to the ears of the listener. Writing is a step removed, given that the spoken word must be inscripted then read, perhaps by someone far distant in space and time. Temporal or physical distance permits all manner of dissembling, so writing, for many persons is suspect. But Derrida aims to deconstruct the tradition and to show that "language is first . . . writing."

Denis Donoghue, an Irishman, holds no truck with Derrida's French curves—at least he seems not to. In his *Ferocious Alphabets,* for example, he divides readers into two groups, epireaders and graphireaders. The former, when confronted with a text, "wants to restore the words to a source, a human situation involving speech, character, personality, and destiny construed as having a personal form." The latter "deals with writing as such and does not think of it as transcribing an event properly construed as vocal and audible." Derrida is, of course, the arch graphireader. A tension exists between Donoghue and Derrida throughout *Ferocious Alphabets* and it continues through his most recent volume, *The Arts Without Mystery.* However, in *The Arts Without Mystery* Donoghue's brogue takes on a decidedly continental air.

Of all forms of modern media, radio is the most logocentric. Printed materials (books, magazines, etc.) are obviously graphic; movies can have subtitles; television is being close-captioned; liner notes accompany musical recordings. But besides the brand name and the characters on the dial, radio provides only sounds. Perhaps Donoghue's apparent dislike of graphireading, of sticking to the word, and pleasure in epireading, or restoring the breath, explains why he spends so much time away from his desk at New York University, where he is the Henry James Professor of Letters, and in a broadcast booth. The first chapter of *Ferocious Alphabets* consists, primarily, of the texts of six talks he gave as a part of the B.B.C.'s "Words" radio program. Chapter two is entitled "Commentary on the Foregoing." Chapter three opens with the sentence "So much for the six talks," and the book becomes more graphicentric (though it attacks graphireading). *The Arts Without Mystery* includes Donoghue's 1982 Reith Lectures: six in number and broadcast over B.B.C. radio. In preparing the lectures for print, Donoghue added occasional notes that appear in the margins—theatrical asides, in effect—and appended further explanations of the points raised in the weekly radio addresses. Print does have its advantages over speech, any enmity toward Derrida notwithstanding.

In contemporary academic parlance, a critic is merely a person who writes about a primary text—a poem, novel, or film. Donoghue was once a critic, as in his *The Ordinary Universe,* wherein he discusses works by James, Yeats, Eliot, and others. Criticism, however, is passé; the thing to be is a metacritic: a critic of

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criticism. Some of those in this category maintain that criticism is itself an art form, given the fact that the interpretation makes the original work of art something other than it was before the critic sharpened his pencil. Although Donoghue correctly states that there should be limits born of discrimination applied to such matters, he himself is pushing back the boundaries in *The Arts Without Mystery,* a tertiary work (i.e., comments on his own metacriticism), which makes him a meta-metacritic—or maybe merely more French. His effort, after all, smacks of deconstruction's "supplement" and "intertextuality," its endless additions and influences and reductions to, through, and from a center that no longer exists. Soon, Donoghue's piling up of defenses for his defenses becomes an exercise in building a cairn for the principle of reductio ad absurdum.

Donoghue's fundamental problem is that he wants to be both a regular guy and a learned connoisseur—a man who identifies with Yeats's peasants and aristocrats. But in his indeterminate flux he becomes neither. He repeatedly stresses that he uses "the word 'bourgeois' as a neutral term and often a term of praise," though it's obvious that he doesn't much care for those who can be so designated. After all, they are the ones who, he maintains, are trying to take the "mystery" out of art, or to "domesticate it." But wait, he shifts again: "I am a member of the middle class; in some respects I coincide with its official interest, in other respects I am alien within it." The final clause is an escape clause: he is a non-bourgeois bourgeois, just as he is an antigraphireader with a tendency for graphireading. These shifts resemble Derridian "freeplay." For being a forthright reader, Donoghue certainly is shifty.

Donoghue's thesis is that "A work of art is in some sense mysterious." This would seem to state that art is, in itself, mysterious. Certainly, there is truth in this concept; something about art is ineffable. Leonard B. Meyer, for example, in *Music, the Arts, and Ideas,* writes of the "aura of primitive magic" that a work of art has, or emanates, and notes that "Once a work is known to be a forgery, that magic is gone." While this is more obviously seen in the case of a van Meegeren discovered passing as a Vermeer, it would be similarly true in the case of a "faked" play by Shakespeare. Donoghue says, "The difference between a great painting and the material from which it is made is finally mysterious," and that in the case of sculpture, "What remains hidden is the presence of the work, the force of its presence as distinct from the particular bits of bronze or marble or whatever it's made of." The medium of the "difference," the "presence," or the "mystery" of the artwork, the artist, would seem to be of fundamental importance. Donoghue disagrees, saying that critics who use the artist as a grounds for discussing the work are evading the real issue, that "Critics who want to escape from the mysteriousness of the work try to replace it by the intention they ascribe to the artist." The focus, it might then be assumed, should be on—and only on—the work of art. Donoghue begins to sound like a nouvelle New Critic, but he dismisses the New Critics, like other critics, as being too reductive: "any established terminology is bound to reduce its object; that is its purpose, to make sense of an obscurity by bringing to bear upon it the sense that has already been made in another way." To risk the wrath of Donoghue, I would interpret that obvious obscurity as meaning that the mystery of art is evident, that everyone who sees it knows it, and that it should be left alone. If this is the case, then Donoghue should be looking for a new line of employment, perhaps as a

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Literature and the Real Person

"In a novel, to take a given person and fit him (or her) in with other characters, 'real' or invented, would not be possible without alteration. The way taken by the novelist in escaping from this predicament might be compared with the manner in which the Greeks made the pillars of their temples slightly convex, so that in perspective they should seem straight. Painters, too, have many artifices in which colour or colours of one kind or another are used to give quite another colour-impression to the eye of the observer."

—from "Literature and the Real Person" by Anthony Powell

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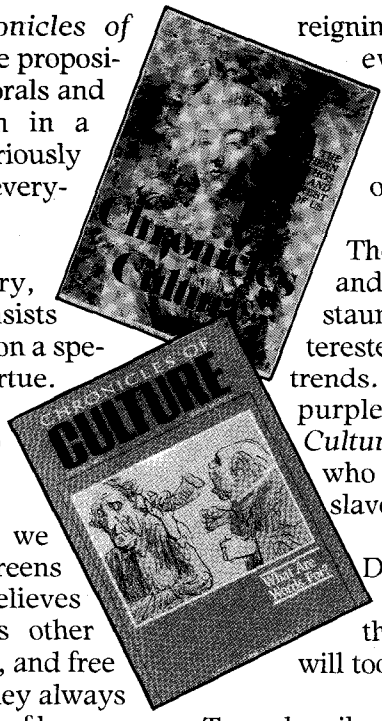

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Even today—in spite of all we witness in print and on the screens —*Chronicles of Culture* believes that literature, art, various other modes of cultural expression, and free intellectual inquiry are, as they always have been, the best guardians of humane values. And that they must be defended, with substance and intensity, from the reigning low standards of critical evaluation. *Chronicles of Culture* is not comfortable reading for those who deem reason and rectitude obsolete.

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disc jockey. But another tack is taken in the discourse before thought on that subject progresses: Donoghue announces, "I want to talk about the arts in relation to the mystery that surrounds them." Surrounds them? What happened to "in" them? Never mind. We're dealing with obscurities here. One thing is evident, though: the mystery is becoming increasingly diffuse, cloudy, spectral. In Donoghue's scheme it's almost as if critics should be replaced by parapsychologists.

In the traditional scheme, a critic should work toward bringing the mystery to the fore and to providing an explanation that provokes clarity. This is incorrect, Donoghue says: "The mark of modern critics is that they are zealots of explanation, they want to deny the arts their mystery, and to degrade mystery into a succession of problems." If this is the case (and I doubt it, for most modern critics are masters of obstruction), then all readers should be happy that there is a tribe of ghostbusters a la Dr. Johnson on guard. Donoghue doesn't trust them, though. Then there are the pernicious effects of the bourgeois tastemakers. The artist, who is at his "best" by being "in conflict with his society," is beset by "modern bourgeois society" which, Donoghue claims, "isn't interested in constraining the artist as much as in domesticating him." On the one hand, then, there are the critics busy with their probes and calipers, trying to discover, measure, and to make moves toward the heart—or spirit—of art; on the other, there is bourgeois society, which is ready to accept anything that's designated art, whether it's an old master or islands surrounded by pink plastic wrap. Donoghue's stance: art will out. The mystery is sufficient unto itself. Nonsense.

People can make judgments about art only if they are informed about it, if they have what Edgar Wind called in his 1960 Reith Lectures "contingent knowledge": an understanding and appreciation of what a work is, how it came to be, and so on. As Leonard B. Meyer puts it, "A work of art does not exist in isolated splendor. It is a part of history—the history of culture, the history of the art, and the history of the artist." These histories, one would suppose, are the interests of an epireader. Art is not hermetic. But Donoghue is no longer particularly interested in definable details that can breathe life into an artwork.

By way of putting the lectures presented in *The Arts Without Mystery* into "the setting and tone in which they began" (it's okay to do so for metacriticism, but not art), Donoghue appends an article he published in *Sewanee Review*, "On the Limits of Language." The article concludes, "The proper sense of words is not in their particular claim to mean and to control the object of their attention; it is to be apprehended, rather, from the relation between the words and the silence that surrounds them." Such a sentence, with its emphasis on some nebulous "silence," would not be wholly out of place in *Of Grammatology*. If

Notables

Pure Drivel

The feminist movement has fallen on hard times. Many of the intellectual leaders of the movement are abandoning the battlefield and withdrawing to the snug fastnesses of fantasy and self-gratification. Some dream of once and future Amazonian kingdoms ruled by women. Others plan to engineer their androgynous land of heart's desire with the nightmare technology of *in vitro* fertilization, hormone injections, and abortion. In the flight from reality, Mary Daly is leading the advance guard in philosophy and theology. In *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Beacon Press; Boston), she invents an entire spiritual universe of Realms and Spheres, Elementals, Principalities, and Powers. To represent this new world, she has had to create a brand new language which might be called Cutespeak. Cutespeak contains new disciplines—Gyn/Ecology, new psychological concepts—Sado-Sublimation, and new publishing terms—a Cat/egorical Appendix (Nonchapter Thirteen) written in part by her cats. Almost any page will do to illustrate the beauties of the new tongue. This sentence is from the first page of the Preface: "The lusty women who rage and roam through the Realms of this book wield the labryses of our lustrous minds—our double-axes of divination—to defeat this obsession/aggression."

Daly is at her best in making up etymologies and verbal connections in which she expresses her utter and absolute contempt for those male-dominated trappings of scholarship—logic, method, and fact. Her verbal equations—gnome = dwarf (a word probably coined by Paracelsus) with the Greek *gnome*—are not out of place in the Realms and Spheres of the feminist universe, but sometimes the poor lady seems to confuse her world of make-believe with the world of other people, and that is where the trouble lies.

Male chauvinists, if there are any left, will delight in a book which seems written to prove that, after all, women are incapable of rational discourse. Go ahead, give them Ph.D.'s. Make them professors at major universities. Treat them seriously as equals. They will still turn cute on you and start talking to their cats and prattling baby talk as if it were English. They will even try to pass off their dictionary-thumbing as profound learning. "She has seven degrees," her cat exclaims to a pedant, "and knows your resources better than you do."

The fact is that there are many real women doing real research and writing real books about women: psychologists like Alice S. Rossi, feminist anthropologists like Alice Schlegel, philosophers like Carol McMillan. *Pure Lust* is a studied affront to such women. If it is widely read—which is nearly impossible to suppose—it could create more prejudice against academic women than anything since affirmative action. □

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there is a problem in the arts today, and I think there is, then it stems, in large part, from this critical tendency to escape into gaps, margins, silences, black holes, and other voids. A moral grounding, once the basis for art, the thing that creates a mystery as it is something that bespeaks that which seems to be beyond man, has been eliminated; boundaries give way to infinitude. People—metacritics and bourgeois patrons of the arts alike—are afraid to know, to understand, to believe, and to be honest. Critical excess isn't as damaging as critical prevarication. □

De-Filed

Penn Kimball: *The File;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

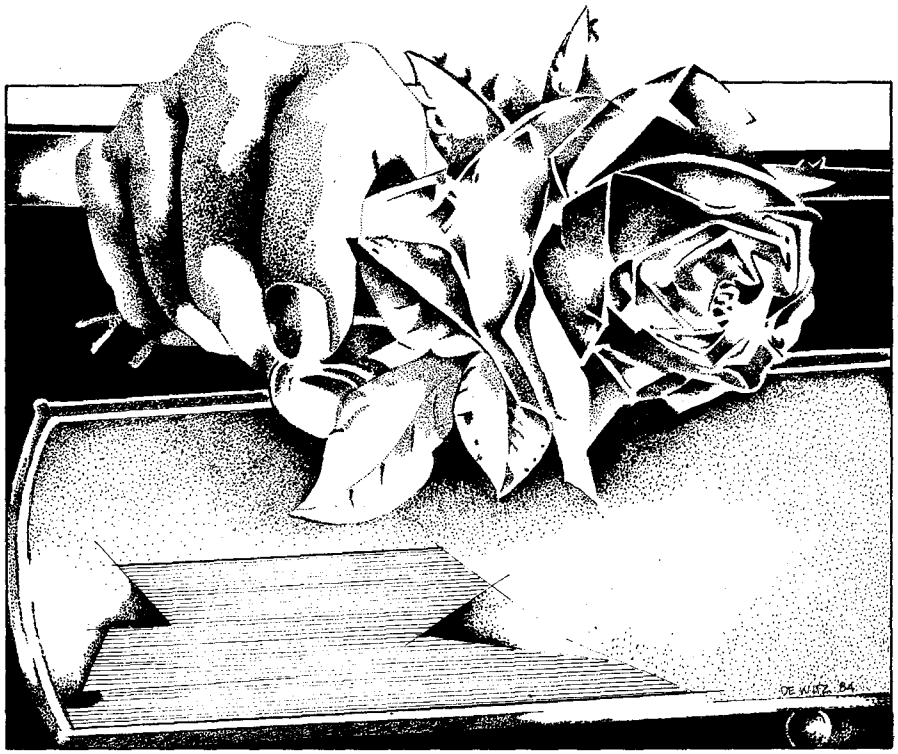
by Charles A. Moser

On the surface, Penn Kimball at 68 might seem to have enjoyed a successful, satisfying life. Born to well-to-do parents of liberal Republican persuasion, he grew up happily in New Britain, Connecticut. After graduating from Lawrenceville, he matriculated at Princeton, where he was editor of the *Daily Princetonian.* He went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Upon his return to the United States in 1939 he was employed by the conservative David Lawrence at *United States News* (the ancestor of *US News and World Report*). During the war he served honorably as a Marine in the Pacific theater, where he knew Joe McCarthy and nearly met John Kennedy.

As the war ended, Kimball took and passed Foreign Service officer examinations but declined an offer from the State Department in favor of a career in journalism, first with *Time,* then with the *New Republic.* In 1948 he tried politics since as a journalist he could not be sufficiently at the center of things: he worked in Chester Bowles's successful campaign for the governorship of Connecticut, and then accepted appointment as executive secretary to Connecticut's Senator William Benton. It was he who wrote Senator Benton's speeches attacking Senator McCarthy very early in that particular game.

After these political endeavors Kimball moved through a series of prestigious journalistic organizations: the *New York Times;* the classic television series "Omnibus"; *Collier's* magazine for a year and a half before it shut down. Thereafter he participated in the early stages of the formation of the Lou Harris polling organization, served as an assistant to Averell Harriman in a losing gubernatorial effort in New York, and finally accepted appointment to the prestigious Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, where he has remained ever since. He is the author of a book on Robert Kennedy, whose portrait dominates his office. Until the recent death of his wife, Kimball enjoyed a long and apparently happy marriage to a woman who shared his interests and aspirations. In short, Kimball has moved along the pinnacles of his chosen profession of journalism and has received his share of honors in this life.

Now, however, as his career draws to a close, Kimball is obsessed. In 1978, after substantial efforts under the provisions of recent legislation, he obtained from the State Department censored copies of his file, from which he discovered that in July 1946 that agency had declared him a "security risk" on grounds of "questionable loyalty." More recently he obtained further documents from the CIA which also contained damaging allegations about



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him. He is certain that his file blocked his appointment as a Foreign Service officer when he sought such a position on one occasion after his initial refusal; he suspects strongly that it prevented him from obtaining a position as FCC commissioner under John Kennedy, and may have contributed to his failure to obtain Fulbright appointments in 1974 and 1978; and he believes that for some reason the CIA in the late 1950's considered offering him a position until it erroneously linked him to Soviet spies Alfred and Martha Stern through a real estate transaction handled by his wife, a real estate agent. Kimball now sees his life as long shadowed by a file which characterized him as a potentially disloyal citizen, without his even having been aware of its existence.

As Kimball sees it, his only recourse was to the court of public opinion through this book, in which, by interweaving autobiography with sometimes excessively detailed quotations from his file, he can make the record whole (he is incensed at the FBI, for example, for "obliterating the truth of . . . my own childhood") and restore his reputation, in addition to raising the entire question of the compilation of such security files. He views himself as among those most likely to be victimized by security files: he is, as he puts it at one point, a "bleeding-heart liberal" or, as he phrases it more seriously at another, a "down-the-line, New Deal liberal." He was always, he says, on the side of the common man and the labor movement (indeed his activities with the Newspaper Guild gave rise to many of his difficulties), and so he naturally gravitated toward politicians on the left: Bowles, Benton, Harriman, Robert Kennedy. He shared a house in New York for a time with Henry Wallace after Truman dismissed Wallace as Secretary of Agriculture. He knows that communists have sought to exert covert influence upon American culture, though he was unsettled to learn that Michael Straight, with whom he was associated at the *New Republic,* was a concealed communist; he apparently accepts the notion that an Alger Hiss could function as an espionage agent within the government. But that does not interest him: what does is the "madness of the McCarthy era," whose worst features he now finds entwined with his own life. Moreover, he thinks, this may not be merely ancient history: not only does his file still exist in Washington today, but in the "age of the Moral Majority," in his words, can we be certain such things are no longer being compiled? Kimball directs his real bitterness toward the anticommunists of the postwar era, and that cast of mind colors the entire book. However, all this does not mean that Kimball does not raise serious issues, for he does.

On one level *The File* is an experiment in the assessment of an individual, interweaving his own autobiography with others' evaluations of him given under a certain set of circumstances. When Kimball obtained the copy of his file he found that a censor had left standing the names of friendly witnesses but systematically obliterated the identities of those who testified against him. He learned that his friends and close associates almost invariably stood by him: that is to say, they provided an assessment of him as favorable as his own, and occasionally more so; and they

LIBERAL CULTURE

. . . *And Now Something Completely Different*

Husbands, who of late have been invaded by an indomitable feeling of limitless partnership with their wives, have become a routine fixture in the delivery rooms across the country. Some Lamaze instructors regularly speak of "the pregnant couple." This unnatural exaggeration of equal participation must have resulted from an exalted exercise of illogical premises: why should we limit our cooperation to the beginning only; let's have it out together till the very end, consistently with the modish intersexual identification games. Never mind that a precious gamut of refined emotions and spiritual experiences get lost in the cancellation of the old ritualized apartness: the spirit of making trite any existential event, of pulling down every traditional curtain of exceptionality and wonder in order to reveal the commonplace wins hands down in the sweepstakes of the liberal culture.

And now, we are one step down the ladder. According to the reports gleefully distributed by CBS News, children of all ages are invited to attend, witness, and inspect what's going on on the obstetrician's table. No agony, privacy, or intimacy any longer accepted, the redemption of our kids is said to be in stark, merciless authenticity. The CBS maven who related the story hailed the event as finally doing away with the mendacities of the stork fable. Well, throughout recorded history, nobody over the age of five believed in storks, but paying lip service to mythology seemed not to be the worst kind of cultural didacticism. Countless generations of strong, valuable, decent personalities have been formed on this innocent falsification of reality, because a nourishing metaphor always was, and still is, the best friend of the moral imagination. How will the generation of toddlers who have faced the murder of the storks in the name of naturalism shape up to be human and civil? We'll see in some two decades. □

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strongly recommended his employment. The anonymous negative evaluations, he believes, came usually from people who did not know him well and who viewed him politically: they tended to be anticommunists, often ex-communists. Moreover, assessments were passed through the mind of the FBI agent conducting the interviews, who frequently distorted their essence; the various interviews were reviewed by still another individual; and finally Kimball's potential employer had to weigh negative accusations against positive recommendations. In these last two stages evaluators could differ profoundly on the material before them. A member of the State Department hierarchy in 1946 took great exception to Kimball's classification as a security risk; the State Department's Appeals Committee on Personnel Security initially did not consider the original classification sufficiently justified even to be appealed; and later Senator Benton dismissed the file as "drivel" upon appointing Kimball to his staff.

It is likely that the file's definition of Kimball as a security risk did prevent him from obtaining a Foreign Service appointment in the late 1940's and possibly a position with the FCC in the early 1960's. But it did not keep him from serving in at least one important government post, and it certainly did not affect the series of positions he held in the private sector. In real life we must repeatedly assess others, usually on the basis of very incomplete information; and when any employer declines to hire an individual utilizing incomplete, incorrect, or misunderstood information, he may affect his life profoundly, even do him an injustice. If we judge by the context of this book, Kimball could not reasonably be classified as a security risk either in 1946 or now, and on that level we may agree that he has been the victim of an injustice which, he says, makes his "emotions cry for revenge." But such injustice is hardly peculiar to government. It inheres in any society in which some individuals must judge others on the basis of limited information, and that means any society which has ever existed.

So strongly does Kimball feel about his case, however, that he set out not only to write this book, but to correct the file itself. In a few instances his censor was careless and he learned the names of certain of his detractors, whom he then decided to confront directly. One of them, the famed liberal James Wechsler, avoided him so skillfully for so long that Kimball finally ceased pursuing him. Another, Gilbert Cant, did meet with Kimball 33 years after the fact. At the meeting Cant maintained that the FBI interviewer had largely misinterpreted his remarks, and Kimball failed to discover in him that "meanness of spirit" which he had confidently expected. He experienced a feeling of sadness rather than vengeful jubilation upon meeting his accuser, who proved no less human than he was. Further, on the basis of indirect evidence Kimball was virtually certain that a third detractor was a woman researcher who had worked at *Time* and whose identity he himself conceals. When he confronted her, however, she denied any complicity so passionately that Kimball comes to wonder whether in her case he is not resorting to the same methods of inferring "guilt by association" and drawing "conclusions at second hand" which vitiated the work of those who investigated him so long ago. And finally he conjectures—with much feebler evidence now—whether a fourth detractor might have been Whittaker Chambers, with whom he had "never traded a word" at *Time.* Given this lack of personal acquaintance, Kimball uses politically stereotyped phrases in describing Chambers as an "oddball," an "ex-communist turned FBI informant." I would prefer to believe that Kimball has never read Chambers's *Witness,* for otherwise he could not have composed the most contemptible sentence in *The File,* when he comments that since Chambers was long dead he could not learn the truth from him in this life—"and I hoped I never ended up where he must be now."

In the end Kimball concludes that he

In the Mail

Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction **by Kay Mussell; Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.** It was bound to happen: a critical study of Harlequin romances.

The Middle Class Credo: 1,000 "All American Beliefs?" **by T. L. Brink; R&E Publishers; Saratoga, CA.** Dr. Brink itemizes some of what "everybody knows." Fodder for TV commercials?

American Values: Opposing Viewpoints **edited by David L. Bender; Greenhaven Press; St. Paul, MN.** Fortunately, there are some defenders of American values on the scene—contributors to this collection and stalwarts of The Rockford Institute, John A. Howard and Allan C. Carlson, for example.

A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson, 1889-1970 **by Christina Scott; Sheed & Ward; London.** A daughter examines her father. And nowhere else will you find a photo of Professor Dawson chatting with Alec Guiness.

A World Without a U.N.: What Would Happen If the United Nations Shut Down **edited by Burton Yale Pines; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC.** A world without Disneyland is a more dread prospect.

The Recovery of Political Theory: Limits and Possibilities **by William C. Havard; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge, LA.** Sometimes, the one to whom a book is dedicated encompasses the text: "To Eric Voegelin."

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can never correct the injustice done to him. No court exists in which he can confront his accusers, most of whom are now dead in any case. He cannot ask to have the file destroyed, for then he could never discover the truth: "how could one ever," he asks, "challenge an anonymous informant whose identity had been permanently removed?" Thus he can only repair to the court of public opinion, with this book as his brief. And yet there is surely more to be said of his case than this.

Kimball has spent nearly all his adult life as a working journalist or a teacher of journalism. In a curious way his file illustrates many of the faults which plague contemporary investigative journalism, especially of the "advocacy" sort. For instance, the file investigators actively sought evidence to demonstrate that Kimball had procommunist sympathies (nobody ever accused him of party membership), and therefore they gravitated toward sources who would tell them what they wished to hear. They clearly tended to avoid those who knew Kimball well and spoke positively of him, and as Kimball himself notes, "an informant, even a skilled journalist, is always somewhat at the mercy of the inquiring visitor." Many who have given interviews to advocacy journalists would sign that statement with a vengeance. Advocacy journalists usually know in advance the pattern they wish to bring out in a story. The pattern is determined by their political convictions, and the story is effective to the extent it juxtaposes right and wrong as black and white, and not as the various shades of gray characteristic of actual reality. Even Kimball admits that he has adopted such an approach: in recalling a strike piece he did for *Time* he comments: "I wrote the Allis-Chalmers story . . . pretty much as I saw it: an unyielding local management using every means at its disposal to avoid dealing with an 'outside' union." Kimball probably knew the "truth" about the strike before he even looked at the facts; in his world it was highly unlikely that a union could be genuinely to blame for a strike. The file investigators simply followed an analogous policy in pursuing their investigations.

Again, Kimball justifiably complains that the file investigators made no attempt to review his published writings as a source of his opinions. But then anyone who has called a press conference at which he distributed a carefully worded and informative statement on some subject knows that journalists in attendance will pay scant notice to the written statement in their hands and instead ask questions about some peripheral trivia which happen to interest them. Moreover, when journalists do obtain the facts, they often misunderstand them. Kimball is rarely guilty of this, but in one instance he clearly misinterprets an important passage from his file to fit in with his general thesis. Less careful journalists than he do this more frequently.

Kimball comments that he had always hoped that he lived under a government which would protect the "common man" from "lasting damage to reputation": and reputation is at issue here, after all. Unlike official investigations, advocacy journalism not only utilizes anonymous sources (the file does not, although many sources have been rendered anonymous to Kimball by the censor's pencil), it also publishes its findings widely, to the "lasting damage" of many reputations. Kimball's file, by contrast, received very limited circulation until he himself wrote this book, and had a similarly limited effect upon his general reputation. From this point of view, then, the work of the file investigators was much less reprehensible than that of advocacy journalists.

LIBERAL CULTURE

The Feminist Inquisition

Long a leading feminist, Jean Bethke Elshtain recently had this to say in *The Progressive* about the vituperative response among sister feminists to her stunning suggestion "that a substantive vision of family life is essential to our humanity":

> If one does not greet as good and progressive all the mixed fruits of sexual liberation and alternative intimate arrangements . . . if, additionally, one insists that there is much that is humanly vital, morally significant, and politically important in inherited images of the family . . . then one must be prepared for an onslaught of criticism. . . .
>
> If one is a member of the intellectual elite, as I am, and a feminist thinker to boot, one's criticism invites criticism of bad faith and suggestions that one is giving aid and comfort to the enemy.
>
> But who is this 'enemy'? Not men . . . . It appears that the real worry is other women.

Ms. Elshtain appears to have stumbled across feminism's own dirty little secret: as much as the most chauvinistic patriarch, feminists want "to keep women in their place" and will persecute to keep them there. The assault upon Ms. Elshtain and others who even hint at departure from feminist orthodoxy will doubtless continue. But those who spearhead this self-righteous assault ought really to move their headquarters out of New York, where they are currently ensconced, to a location a bit to the north. Salem offers such a congenial setting for witch-hunts. □

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Finally, it should be noted that as a political liberal Kimball has no doubt consistently supported programs which would extend the reach of government even further into our economy and our culture and which therefore would expand the influence of files like his in our society. In the real world government usually controls that which it supports, and demands some form of loyalty from its subjects. Although Penn Kimball the citizen is the victim of a moral and legal injustice documented in this book, Penn Kimball the journalist and political liberal has been subjected to a kind of poetic justice. May that move him and us to think more deeply about some of the issues he raises. □

These Foolish Things

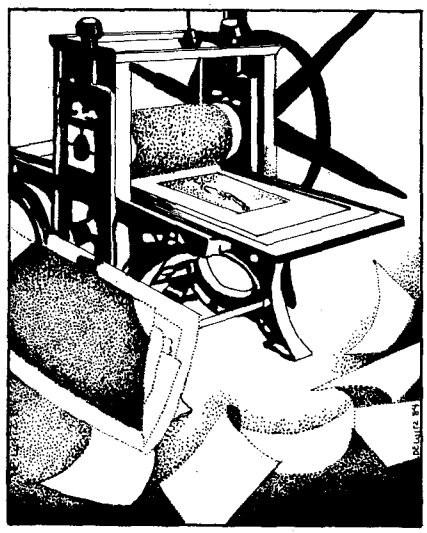
Barbara W. Tuchman: *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam;* Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

William L. Shirer: *20th Century Journey: A Memoir of a Life and the Times. Volume II: The Nightmare Years, 1930-1940;* Little, Brown & Company, Boston.

by Stephen J. Sniegoski

The world of nations, like the world of nature, is characterized by an unremitting struggle for existence. To survive in this milieu, governments must not pursue policies that run significantly counter to their own interests. Yet, self-interest is rarely clearly defined, and even on those occasions when there is a generally agreed upon self-interest, it is not always apparent what particular policies would further it. Sometimes, even if self-interest is pursued, the obstacles faced may be insurmountable. Nevertheless, it would seem that the course of history, strewn with the carcasses of fallen governments, states, and nations, shows that self-interest has not always been correctly identified or pursued. It is this failure to follow self-interest on the part of governments that is dealt with at length in recent books by two intellectual luminaries of the liberal establishment—Barbara Tuchman and William L. Shirer. And though it is unintentional, these works stimulate thinking on the relationship between contemporary liberalism and American national interest.

Barbara Tuchman, author of a number of best-selling historical works, examines the issue of governmental folly—defined as a government's pursuit of policies contrary to its own interests despite the existence of recognized alternatives. Folly is the irrational persistence in a



policy despite clear-cut evidence that it is counterproductive. While providing numerous historical illustrations of folly, Tuchman focuses on four events which she regards to be of particular significance. The first is the Trojan War, in which as the legend has it, the Trojans misguidedly took the Wooden Horse within their walls, oblivious to numerous warnings and ill omens, thus bringing on their own destruction. Next, Tuchman covers the Renaissance Papacy of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, which was totally engrossed in secular affairs—art, welfare, carnality, money-making schemes—to the neglect of its spiritual realm. Numerous calls for repentance and renewal were unheeded. The ultimate result was popular disgust with the Papacy and the Protestant Reformation. Tuchman then looks at Britain's George III and his government's blind refusal to understand the American colonists. Placing its emphasis on the enforcement of abstract principle—Parliament's right to tax—and ignoring the realities of the situation, Britain unintentionally fomented rebellion and ultimately lost its American colonies. Finally, Tuchman's liberal mind-set is revealed most clearly in her discussion of America's Vietnam debacle, where she offers those well-worn clichés that everyone but an eremite must know by heart. According to this view, American intervention in Vietnam was the result of monomaniacal anticommunism. Vietnamese communism was probably not initially true communism, and even if it was, it was fundamentally nationalistic and thus not an enemy of the United States. American hostility made Vietnamese nationalism the communist foe that it eventually became.

Unlike Jane Fonda, Tuchman does admit that Ho Chi Minh and his crew were totalitarian and ruthless, but this was to be expected since individual freedom and democracy are concepts alien to Southeast Asia. Oddly enough, this excuse for communist brutality does not prevent her from lambasting the noncommunist governments of South Vietnam for their departures from democratic practice. In Tuchman's view, America did everything possible to destroy communism in South Vietnam, but since America's puppet governments lacked popular support and because Vietnamese communists identified so completely with the nationalis-

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tic aspirations of the Vietnamese people, America's final defeat was inevitable. But it was actually the prosecution of the war that was more deleterious to America than the ultimate defeat. All during the Vietnam War era, America's leaders continually lied to the public to a degree never before witnessed in American history. As a consequence, the American people, especially the idealistic youth, lost faith in their government and its institutions.

Obviously, the Vietnam myth recited by Tuchman bears little resemblance to reality. Totalitarian Vietnamese communism was far more repressive than authoritarian regimes of South Vietnam. While America spent billions of dollars and lost thousands of men in Vietnam, the restrictions placed on the military would have made victory unlikely in any war against a determined foe. The United States government did not talk openly to its citizens, but this would

Notables

Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered

The barest plot outline of John Updike's latest novel, *The Witches of Eastwick,* gives more than a few hints of how far he has gone as a social reactionary. Three attractive women in Eastwick, Rhode Island, have liberated themselves from their husbands by the unconventional means of witchcraft. The effect of their spells was to shrink their victims down to the dimensions of mementos. Updike's first description of such a transition is worth quoting, if only because most reviewers have contented themselves with referring to the witches as divorcees:

> . . . she had reduced dear Ozzie as he made his daily trek to work and back along Route 4 first to the size of a mere man, the armor of patriarchal protector falling from him in the corrosive salt air of Eastwick's maternal beauty, and then to the size of a child as his chronic needs and equally chronic acceptance of her solutions to them made him appear pitiful, manipulable . . . . He had become much involved with their sons' Little League activities . . . . As Alexandra accepted first one and then several lovers, her cuckolded husband shrank to the dimensions and dryness of a doll . . . . By the time of their actual divorce her former lord and master had become mere dirt—matter in the wrong place, as her mother had briskly defined it long ago—some polychrome dust she swept up and kept in a jar as a souvenir.

Updike never makes it clear whether or not he intends us to understand this process as fact or metaphor. What he does suggest is that like Tithonus, modern men have been washed, shrunk, and hung out to dry by the powerful women to whom they look for love and strength.

It was clearly Updike's intention to write a fable, almost an allegory on the liberation of women. The witches are described in the same terms used by feminist writers in portraying their heroines. There is a lesbian undercurrent which threatens, from time to time, to pull the witches under. At times, it reads like a parody of feminist fiction—the same incessant physiological references, the same obsessive allusions to feminine hygiene—but then, Updike has always dipped his pen in vital secretions. Ultimately, his attack on the Movement is not all that subtle. He goes out of his way to set up certain equations: witchcraft as liberation, witchcraft as bitchiness, even witchcraft as gossip. Yet, these liberated ladies cannot sustain themselves on the occult forces of the earth, which are celebrated with increasing ardor and frequency by radical feminists: while they are the bane of weak-willed modern men, they are all too eager to surrender their will to the first old-fashioned, dominant male that comes along.

While Updike may have meant no more than a satire on feminists, it is just as much an attack on women themselves. There is a bitterness, a foulness, a nastiness in his treatment of all the major female characters in the novel. His hostility seems as much inspired by misogyny as it is by a spirit of social criticism. His ordinary women are no less revolting than his feminist witches: one of them is a brutal parody of Phyllis Schlafly's American woman: the bright and perky cheerleader who has aged gracelessly into a shrill crusader for moral decency. Her husband finally beats her to death with a poker, just to shut her up. No manner of womanhood will please the disenchanted male.

A psychoanalyst might speculate on Updike's development. For years he has been writing novels which celebrate the pleasures and virtues of swinging. Their "message" might have been taken from the "*Playboy* Philosophy." Now he appears to have fallen out of love not only with adultery but with the sex itself. His is an easy mistake. All too many men buy the feminist claim that they and they alone represent women. In reality, the feminists represent women to the same extent that Ms. Ferraro represents American motherhood.

Updike is still the master salesman. He has brought off a sort of coup by palming off an antifeminist jeremiad as a sensitive modern novel. As a work of fiction, it is hardly successful. None of the characters receives more development than a guest star on the *Love Boat.* As a tale, it is not worth the waste of an evening. Worse, it is disfigured by Updike's usual brand of fine writing—the pretty set pieces of description which make most creative-writing teachers drool but inspire average readers to turn the pages quickly. Updike exhibits all the usual tendencies of the burnt-out novelist who has bright ideas for essays but has exhausted his ability to reinvent the world. Economic pressures often compel them to turn their essays into novels which leave the impression of being written for the sake of writing. The result is a book to be read only for the sake of reading. □

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seem no more egregious than the lies and distortions made by the Roosevelt Administration during and just prior to World War II. Finally, it was not the élan of the North Vietnamese that in the end enabled them to prevail, but the fact that they were heavily armed by the Soviet Union.

The lesson drawn from Vietnam, which serves as the guiding light for fashionable thinking on foreign policy, is that the United States should never oppose procommunist movements nor ever support anticommunist ones. Ironically, while leftists now preach nonresistance to totalitarianism, when they look at the 1930's they see as the ultimate folly the failure of the Western democracies to resist nazism. An early and prominent exponent of this anti-appeasement view, which has become historical orthodoxy, is William L. Shirer, who was situated in Europe during the 1930's, first as a newspaper reporter and later as a radio commentator. Shirer has focused on this antiappeasement theme in a number of popular books—the most notable of which is the highly acclaimed *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. The Nightmare Years* is an autobiographical account of the appeasement era. (This book is the second volume of Shirer's memoirs, the first of which, *The Start,* published in 1976, covers his life before 1930.)

In capsule form the orthodox anti-appeasement interpretation of these events runs as follows: From Hitler's very accession to power, Germany took steps to regain military strength and thus be able to move toward foreign aggression. Since even these early steps to remilitarization were treaty violations (of the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Pact), Britain and France had the legal and moral authority to launch preemptive war and thus nip the nazi menace in the bud. Most certainly, they should have waged war when Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936 or when he threatened Czechoslovakia in the Sudetenland crisis of 1938. Instead of pursuing the moral and realistic course of waging war, the leaders of Britain and France opted for appeasement that only allowed the nazi German peril to increase its strength. While there were a number of motives for appeasement—fear of war, naiveté toward Hitler—looming largest was the conservative British and French leaders' hysterical fear of communism and their perception of Hitler, a "right-wing" dictator, as a bulwark against proletarian revolution. Instead of opposing communism, self-interest dictated that Britain and France form an alliance with the Soviet Union to thwart nazi aggression.

This interpretation of appeasement with its highly censorious, moralistic tone, while not such a distortion of reality as the Vietnam myth, is nonetheless a simplistic rendition of the complicated events of the 1930's. First of all, the morality and legality of Hitler's pre-1939 actions were ambiguous, not a clear-cut case of wrongdoing demanding British and French retaliation. The Versailles Treaty had lost its moral authority years before Hitler attained power. Whereas the Versailles Treaty had been predicated on the assumption that Germany was the aggressor in World War I, most historians had absolved Germany of that guilt. Instead of perceiving Germany as an inherent aggressor that had to be kept down, fashionable public opinion in Great Britain had come to look upon Germany as the aggrieved nation and postwar France as the oppressor. Germany's program of rearmament and its remilitarization of the Rhineland could be easily viewed as justifiable exercise of its sovereignty. And in Hitler's pre-1939 territorial expansion—*Anschluss* with Austria and the acquisition of the Sudetenland—Germany was merely gaining land inhabited mainly by ethnic Germans, most of whom seemed to desire incorporation into the Reich. This conformed to the universally acclaimed principle of national self-determination which the Treaty of Versailles had failed to apply when it would have been to Germany's benefit.

Finally, the orthodox critique of appeasement downplays the importance of the strong pacifistic sentiments in the Western democracies that placed constraints on policymakers. The awful carnage of World War I had turned public opinion vehemently against war. And the development of air power fostered an almost pathological fear that civilian populations would suffer immeasurably in a future war. Fear-mongers contended that air attacks using poisonous gas would completely wipe out urban populations. This antiwar attitude was most intense on the left and was concretely reflected in the fact that the British Labour Party continually voted against rearmament up until the outbreak of war in September 1939. With the aid of hindsight it is easy to brand the appeasers as utterly misguided. But given the context of the 1930's, such a verdict is not that clear. At least, before holding up appeasement to censure or ridicule, it is appropriate to take a closer look at the contemporary liberal orthodoxy to which Tuchman and Shirer so completely subscribe.

Tuchman castigates America's possession of nuclear armaments, its support for El Salvador, and the pursuit of economic growth. Shirer equates the appeasers' attitude toward Hitler with what he alleges to be America's current fondness for right-wing dictatorships. He was extremely agitated over America's invasion of Grenada. Goldsmith's observation that "the folly of others is ever most ridiculous to those who are themselves most foolish" might be applied to Tuchman and Shirer. But there is a difference. For as misguided as the fools of history might have been, they did not actually desire the destruction of their society. The Trojans did not want their city sacked; the Renaissance Popes did not will the Protestant Reformation; the appeasers of the 1930's did not desire a Hitler-controlled Europe. The results of their policies, in short, ran counter to their desired outcomes in addition to being contrary to the self-interest of their groups and countries.

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While at this juncture of history, American power has declined dramatically to the point where survival itself is now in question, it is not apparent that this calamity has been unwelcome to the ideological agenda of the European and American Left. This is not to say that they consciously desire the destruction of the West: one of their main problems is the failure to think in terms of the ultimate consequences of ideas. The demise of America and the West may prove to be the final result of liberal thought. It is for this reason that James Burnham referred to liberalism as "the ideology of Western suicide." Liberalism, as we know it *now,* may be therefore, a step beyond folly—a halfway position between the conscious agent of defeat, and the foolish individual depicted by Tuchman and Shirer.

Where folly is the cause of self-destruction, a reversal of policy is always possible, which, if undertaken in time, can bring about recovery. Thus, the Protestant Reformation sparked the Catholic Reformation, which enabled the Church to gain new spiritual vigor and not only contain the spread of Protestantism but recoup some losses. And the final German takeover of Czecho-Slovakia in 1939 caused Neville Chamberlain, the quintessential appeaser, to realize that further German expansion could not be tolerated. Individuals and groups under the spell of folly can ultimately learn from their mistakes. Modern liberalism, in contrast, is immune to reality. In its essence, liberalism is nonfalsifiable. America's defeats, or the wrongdoing of America's enemies, can always be interpreted as underscoring America's perfidy. In this light, American failures in Southeast Asia, Iran, and China are seen as the result of America's having supported the wrong, "unpopular" side. Soviet aggression in Afghanistan or Eastern Europe is interpreted as the end product of previous American belligerency. How long the United States can survive so self-destructive an ideology is an open question. □

Curious Behavior

Jerome Bruner: *In Search of Mind: Essays in Autobiography;* Harper & Row; New York.

by Richard Peters

The so-called cognitive revolution occurred during the career of Jerome Bruner, and his history is essentially its history. At the time Bruner entered the field of psychology it was almost totally dominated by various offshoots of Behaviorism. Behaviorism rests on the paradoxical notion that psychology can be studied best by identifying the stimulus that activates a living organism and then observing the action (behavior) of that organism in response to the impingement of the designated stimulus. The paradoxical quality arises from the fact that the organism itself, from which, presumably, the activity arises, is ignored. When the organism to be studied in this peculiar fashion happens to be man, the antimentalistic character of Behaviorism becomes clear. Practitioners of this theoretical persuasion find themselves in the strange position of studying learning, memory, perception, and other attributes of the mind without actually acknowledging the mind's existence. The common man, of course, has always known that in order to understand why a person reacts to a given situation (stimulus) in the way that he does, one needs to know either what his experience with similar situations has been, *or* what is motivating him at the moment, preferably both.

Jerome Bruner was too clever to be taken in by the absurd reductionism of the Behaviorists. He was acutely aware of the shortcomings of Academic Psychology and quotes Wittgenstein on the "confusion and bareness of psychology" and its marriage of "experimental methods and conceptual confusion" in which "problems and methods pass one another by."

Bruner and his fellow graduate students at Harvard were opposed to the direct linkage of stimulus and response being taught there in the years just prior to World War II. They believed that there had to be some organizing and selecting principles operating within the organism and hence found themselves taking a mentalistic view; the mind regained its existence. Following the war Bruner and his colleagues were, in the spirit of the times, as interested in the ideas of sociologists and anthropologists as they were in those of psychologists, and began studying the functions of opinions. At the same time, Bruner investigated the sources of perceptual selectivity. If you take the larger view, it is inescapable that the organisms studied by psychologists are always in contact with a complex array of stimuli. And this certainly includes that maddeningly adaptable and cunning animal that reigned king in the Behaviorist laboratories—the rat. The alternative to the impossible task of reducing such subjects to *one* available stimulus was to pretend that it only attended to the stimulus selected by the experimenter, a maze, electric shock, food pellet, or whatever. When the subjects are human beings, they have opinions and attitudes about the experiment, the experimenter, and all sorts of things never identified by the psychologist as existing within the framework of the experiment. This is not to suggest that rats do not have opinions and attitudes about these things also; they must. It is, however, impossible to demonstrate and prove such matters as rats' opinions.

With humans it can be shown that of the vast array of constantly available stimuli, most are not attended to at all in

Dr. Peters is a practicing psychoanalyst.

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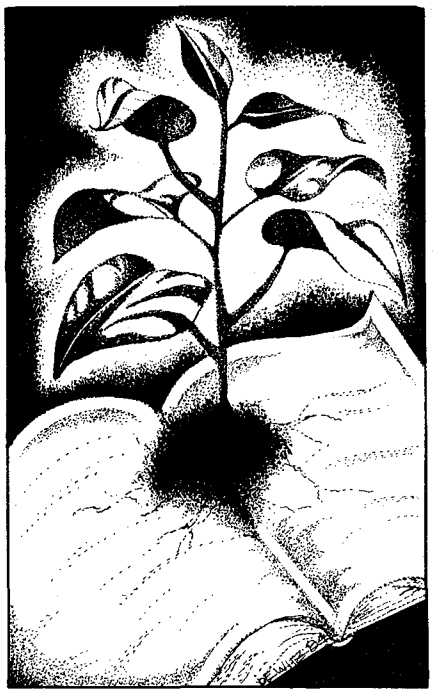
any given instant, and some only marginally. Further, those stimuli that are attended to are often perceived differently by various people. Differences in the accompanying instructions result in the people "seeing" different things in identical situations. The young cognitive psychologists understood that perceptual selection was taking place; some stimuli were being excluded and others interpreted. Previously held opinions also influenced perceptual selection and organization of stimuli. Formerly the problem of admission or exclusion of information had been conceptualized by the "Judas Eye" concept. This homunculus-like idea of an "inside person" scanning the data and refusing some of it in favor of the rest was derided by antimentalistic psychologists. Other important sources of ideas from outside psychology proper were information theory and computer science. These provided useful metaphors for Bruner's thinking about issues arising from the study of perception. The solution of the "Judas Eye" dilemma was aided by observing the filtering functions performed by computers when they "decided" what should be displayed. Information theory provided ideas that led to the notions of "perceptual readiness" and "cognitive strategies," further clarifying the perceptual process.

Undeterred by the tradition of dividing psychology into areas, such as learning, perception, and the like, Bruner followed his ideas across these artificial and counterproductive boundaries and studied "thinking." While examining thought processes it became clear to him that meaning depended upon context and use rather than on some intrinsic quality of things, so Bruner found himself studying how and when mind developed in the young. A further step across traditional boundaries was necessitated by his developing conviction that the growth and form of the mind was greatly influenced by culture and language. An interest in education followed naturally from the insight that things children learn influence how they see the world, and Bruner began studying how children acquire knowledge in general and language in particular. His ensuing foray into curriculum development led him into political controversy; this storm was not about his methods, however, but was over the content of his curriculum.



Despite the success of the cognitive revolution, the deeper character of Academic Psychology asserted itself in the end, leaving Bruner feeling that psychology was "more splintered" and "beset by contradictions" than when he entered the field. Bruner would undoubtedly still see Wittgenstein as fully justified in describing psychology as barren and as failing to bring its problems and its methods into any useful juxtaposition. It is difficult to assess Bruner's achievements in psychology. He does not do so directly in his autobiography. Indirectly, his indictment of psychology is perhaps an admission that he did not succeed in putting psychology on the right road, either in terms of breaking down its little artificial kingdoms or in getting the hard but fruitful questions asked and the methodology adjusted to them.

During the course of his long career Jerome Bruner hobnobbed with many brilliant and creative individuals, all of whom were leaders in their fields. He was a faculty member at highly distinguished schools and published a large number of scientific articles and books. His advice was sought by political figures who had important roles in shaping policy for the U.S. government. It's evident that he was a highly inspirational and charismatic figure to both graduate students and peers, and that his charisma was backed up by intellectual soundness. How, then, did a man of such breadth and substance turn out a shallow and tedious book? This is all the more curious since he lived so intimately in the world of ideas that the book is intended to portray.

Bruner is most interesting (and is perhaps most interested) when he deals with paradoxes or dilemmas of a strongly philosophical bent, as, for example, when he quotes Lionel Trilling about the "wound" suffered by the nonscientific intellectual in the face of his inability to fully comprehend the "deep and powerful" ideas of science. Such a wonderfully titillating theme is immediately dropped, however, and is followed by another story that is never finished. Bruner is perpetually beginning things and never finishing them or even developing them very far in this book. One suspects that this is the case because Bruner can never bring himself to discuss anything unpleasant except in the most general terms. This was true whether the subject is the political disagreements that tore apart Bruner's intellectual world or the sources of his marital failures. Bruner's failure to develop his intellectual themes beyond a superficial level and his unwillingness to provide the full dimensions of interpersonal relations between the luminaries whose names fill this book make for singularly disappointing and insubstantial fare. □

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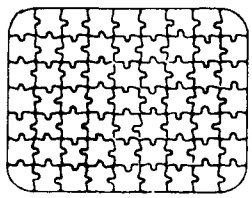
COMMENDABLES

A Dangerous Classic

Richard M. Weaver: *Ideas Have Consequences;* University of Chicago; Chicago and London.

Richard Weaver was among the rarest of rare birds: an American political philosopher. His intellectual roots reach back through the Nashville Agrarians (Donald Davidson, especially) to Calhoun and ultimately to Thomas and Aristotle. A professed enemy of the Whig Liberal tradition, Weaver saw the virtues of social hierarchy, chivalry, and authority in an era when such notions had become museum relics everywhere outside of places like his hometown, Weaverville, North Carolina. Almost single-handedly, Weaver took up the defense of the permanent things in postwar America and held on to a religious vision of society that was so old-fashioned it had come to seem an innovation.

The University of Chicago Press is to be commended for reissuing *Ideas Have Consequences*—Weaver's most profound and influential work. It is above all a dangerous book, hazardous to the complacency of all the Marxists and libertarians who wish to reduce the whole of life to market forces. Weaver, if he were writing today, would be hard pressed to find a publisher. □



Ideological Body Count

Timothy J. Lomperis: *The War Everyone Lost—And Won: America's Intervention in Viet Nam's Twin Struggles;* Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

Ideas are among the casualties in any war. The Mikado's divinity, for instance, perished along with thousands of sailors and soldiers in the South Pacific. And if the concept of state's rights did not die at Gettysburg and Antietam, it was at least seriously wounded. Now that America has belatedly—and insufficiently—honored those who perished on her behalf in Vietnam, the time is ripe for assessing what ideas met their demise in that conflict.

The belief is common in the Western intelligentsia that in Vietnam the communist theory of "people's war" of national liberation utterly vanquished the American theory of containment. It is true that when the smoke had settled North Vietnamese tanks were in possession of Saigon and the Americans were nowhere to be seen. However, precisely because North Vietnamese armor and not pajama-clad Viet Cong were finally responsible for the defeat of South Vietnam, we have reason to suspect that somewhere along the line the "people's war" fell apart. Indeed, in *The War Everyone Lost—And Won,* Timothy J. Lomperis convincingly demonstrates that as ill-conceived as it was in many respects, the American intervention did succeed in utterly demolishing the communist formula for victory with legitimacy. Communist efforts to maintain even the semblance of an indigenous guerrilla movement in the south were faltering by 1967. After the decisive American and South Vietnamese victory in Tet, the war became almost entirely a conventional war of North Vietnamese aggression. But largely because the media misrepresented Tet as a communist triumph, Congress subsequently withdrew almost all American aid for a South Vietnamese government that probably required no more than matériel and air support to hold off an invasion. "The United States," observes Lomperis, ". . . won a war it thought it lost, and lost by default what it could have won."

Yet even with the advantage of historical hindsight, many Western intellectuals are, as Professor Lomperis notes, strangely myopic in drawing their lessons from the Vietnam experience. They respond to every American attempt to check communist aggression in Africa or Central America with dire warnings about "another Vietnam." To them, the people's war theory is still alive, its potency forever proved in the jungles of Indochina. Since this beloved theory has actually been a corpse for at least 15 years, those who persist in dragging it out so often should not be offended if we now plug our noses. (BC) □

Fighting the Media Moguls

Reed Irvine: *Media Mischief and Misdeeds;* Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

Ignorance may not be bliss but it is preferable to misinformation. This was understood by the millions of Americans who cheered when President Reagan refused to allow journalists into Grenada. Their experience with the media over the past two decades had convinced them that a news blackout was better than broadcasts and wire stories twisted by a reportorial animus against patriotic impulses as well as against the military and conservative administrations. But as superior as silence is to distortion, neither is as satisfactory as in-depth knowledge. Reed Irvine, chairman of Accuracy in Media, has spent the last 15 years providing such knowledge through an unusual sort of investigative reporting. What Mr. Irvine chiefly investigates is reporters themselves, ferreting out the dirty little secrets that newspaper readers and television viewers really do have a right to know. *Media Mischief and Misdeeds* is a collection of the 1983 newspaper columns in which he repeatedly catches the media violating its own professed standards of fairness and objectivity by truncating, obscuring, and falsifying everything that

does not fit their biases. If all anchormen, columnists, and correspondents were as clear-sighted as Mr. Irvine, we could only rejoice to see them sent to Grenada —or Washington. □

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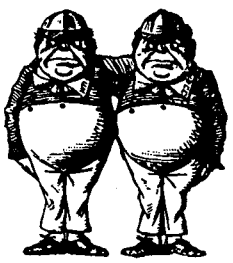
Of Puerile Pedagogy

Richard H. Powers: ***The Dilemma of Education in a Democracy;*** Regnery Gateway; Chicago.

In a universal referendum, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which predicts the universe's eventual dissolution, would not win approval. But few people are qualified to evaluate the laws of physics. Science cannot proceed on the democratic principle of one man, one vote. The 19th-century promoters of public education argued eloquently that democracy needed educated voters. What they left unsaid was that academic principles must themselves remain beyond the reach of the public will. Richard H. Powers demonstrates that the triumph of democracy over scholarship has made American public education an expensive fiction. The Second Law of Thermodynamics may



not have been put to a vote, but along with all other concepts likely to expose the inherent inequality among students, it has been expunged from the curriculum. Professor Powers offers few original insights in his argument that egalitarianism has destroyed the nation's schools, but his sanity and candor make his analysis worthwhile. His book did deserve an index and more careful proofreading from the publisher—although most recent high school graduates will never notice the errors. □

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IN FOCUS

Journey to Nowhere

Lesley Blanch: ***Pierre Loti: The Legendary Romantic;*** Helen and Kurt Wolff/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

In the end, nothing is more boring than adventure. Once the newness has worn off, foreign landscapes, forbidden loves, and bizarre rituals prove less stimulating than familiar settings, ordinary people, and well-worn traditions. This is why the greatest writers have consistently been provincialists, in the best sense of the word. Even in the works of the cosmopolitan Henry James, the reader finds the social, geographic, and ethical boundaries of a "province" in which James made his permanent home after moving from America.

Though talented, Julien Marie Viaud—known to his readers as Pierre Loti—never became a great writer precisely because in his restlessly romantic search for adventure he never found a people, place, or faith that he could fully call his own. Bearing an assumed name, attired in high heels and makeup, often in Oriental costume, he refused to accept as a "home" even his natural identity. ("I was not my type," he said.) Leaving his provincial birthplace of Rochefort for the French navy as a young man, he circled the globe pursuing scenic diversion and amorous excitement (with both sexes), while neglecting his wife.

By turning his aimless quests into autobiographical fiction, Loti captured a worldwide audience and favorable critical acclaim. "It was reserved for Pierre Loti," declared Anatole France, "to make us savour—to the point of intoxication, of delirium, of stupor, even—the bitter flavour of exotic loves." But intoxication eventually passes and sobriety returns; consequently, Loti's works are "largely forgotten" today. Lesley Blanch argues that this is so because "the flavour of travel is lost" in our modern jet age. But perhaps the real reason for the current neglect of Loti's work is not that modern transportation has shrunk the world, but rather that the world view with which Loti sailed about was hopelessly contracted and self-centered in the first place. Despite all of his voyaging, despite all of his crossing of boundaries of every sort, Loti failed to escape from the narrowness of his own narrow egotism. The fabric of his art was rich with imported threads, but it was woven on the tiny loom of the self. As a result all of his

traveling now fails to *move* us to any place that satisfies our hearts or minds. Maybe if he had spent more time in Rochefort with his spouse and countrymen, Loti might have reached some place modern readers would still find worth visiting. (BC) □

Venusberg on the Hudson

Lawrence Foster: ***Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community;*** University of Illinois Press; Urbana and Chicago.

There was definitely something strange going on in the U.S. during the 1830's and 1840's. One after another, eccentric social and religious movements seemed to spring up overnight like exotic mushrooms. Spiritualism, women's rights, abolitionism, and bizarre religious sects swept across the Northeast. New experimental communities were set up: Fourierist phalansteries, the Transcendentalist Brook Farm, the Universalist Hopedale, the gathered communities of Shakers, and—most successfully—the Oneida Community of Perfectionists and the Mormon settlements of Nauvoo, Illinois, and the Utah Territory. Despite the apparent diversity there are certain features common to most of these groups. Most basic was their desire to found a new, perfect society, an earthly paradise, in which the troubled individual would be submerged into the greater community. None of the groups was content with any variety of Christian orthodoxy—even the most conservative were liberal interpreters of the Scriptures. Nearly all of them exercised a rigid control over the sexual life of their members. The Shakers simply suppressed it, while the Mormons and Perfectionists experimented with alternate marriage forms. It is this relationship between religion and sexuality that Lawrence Foster explores.

Why did these movements develop when they did and where they did—in western New York State? Foster rejects a simpleminded economic answer in favor of a social explanation: the expansion of America in the decades after the Revolution "could not help but place special strains on family life and relations between the sexes." Unfortunately, Foster offers little or no evidence to substantiate his modest thesis. What he does provide is a coherent and readable account of three religious movements with a special emphasis on their sexual innova-

tions. The celibacy of the Shakers, the polygamy of the Mormons, and the complex (we should now say open or swinging) marriages at Oneida were all designed to buttress the social stability and solidify the sense of community. The individual was the enemy. By imposing a new form of corporate life which deemphasized ordinary conjugal ties, these religious communes hoped to eliminate the sexual pressures which they believed were the cause of social disruption.

In practice, it was not quite so simple. John Humphrey Noyes, the founder of the Perfectionists, was a complex case. Like many liberal theologians since, the timid Noyes always managed to find religious sanctions for his philandering. Still, there was more to his theory than hypocrisy. His peculiar system of complex marriage, *coitus reservatus,* and selective breeding was aimed at reducing sexual tensions and rivalries. As far as Noyes was concerned, the only two workable systems were his own and the sexual denial of the Shakers. Ordinary life, because of its imperfections, was not good enough. Even Mormon poly-

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gamy, although it put a serious strain on many converts, tended to reduce rather than enhance the sexual excitement within the household. Most men cannot be as devoted to four wives as they would be to one. The same is true of the wives. In the Mormon communities—as in most of the 19th-century utopias—women tended to play a larger role than was customary in American society.

Foster finds a great deal of good in these movements. Without minimizing the potential dangers, he emphasizes their "healthy, restorative side." The early 19th century was a time of crisis. Industrialization, the movement West, and the disintegration of religious authority seemed to leave a spiritual vacuum which could only be filled by the promise of perfection. The strange sexual arrangements adopted by millennialist sects were only strategies for dealing with social crisis. Every society in transition has recourse to "liminal" rituals as devices for bridging the gap between the old world and the new. These rituals are analogous to the initiation rites that mark the passage of a child into an adult: confirmation, bar mitzvah, going off to college.

All this is so and yet, even if we concede the accuracy of Foster's analysis, problems remain. For one thing, he fails to recognize sufficiently that the Mormons have endured and succeeded, at least in part, because of their normal family life. In the end, his defense of the Shakers and the Perfectionists could just as well be applied to the Hog Farm commune or the People's Temple. America now, as in the 1830's, is troubled by the feeling that progress and prosperity are not enough. Now, as then, the unlettered classes are being stirred up by outlandish preachers like Jim Jones and Sun Myung Moon. Our children go awhoring after the strange gods of Daishonin Buddhism, Est, and personal growth movements. Once again, the mainstream churches have given up preaching the Gospel in favor of philosophizing about nuclear war, social change, and revolution. It is one thing to admit that we have gone astray and another to find much good to say about the wolves that are preying upon the lost sheep.

It is important to remember

that whole areas of the country and segments of society can remain untouched by religious exoticism. In the 1850's George Fitzhugh pointed out that the very same group of exhausted Puritans that were turning to Unitarianism and Transcendentalism were also the prime victims of socialist and millennialist movements. It is the vague, liberal (and liberation) theology of our churches that sets the stage for each new company of would-be Antichrists. Southern Baptists, old-fashioned Catholics, and conservative Lutherans do not offer up their children as sacrifice to the Unification Church. Perhaps the real lesson we can take away from Foster's study is "Teach your children well." □

Historical Hypocrisy

Benjamin F. Martin: ***The Hypocrisy of Justice in the Belle Epoque;*** Louisiana State University; Baton Rouge.

The Dreyfus case shocked the world in the 1890's. The persecution of an innocent military officer and the outburst of anti-Semitism which the trials occasioned were seen as a travesty of French law and the legal traditions of civilized Europe. Benjamin Martin thinks not. In a study of three celebrated trials, he attempts to prove that French justice was at best a sometime thing, subject to the influence of wealth, power, and the emotional appeals of beautiful women.

The cases make fascinating reading, but Martin must know very little of the world in his own time if he can find anything unusual in corrupt politicians, inept policemen, and unfaithful wives. "Justice departed so far from its ideals that it was seen not as an opportunity for the strict application of the law but for a system of rewards and punishments meted out in accordance with an idiosyncratic view of social utility." Such a condemnation could be applied to our own judicial system more fairly than to France at the turn of the century.

In at least one of the three trials, the accused would certainly be set free today; in another, the most probable verdict would be not guilty by reason of insanity. So what is the point? The real point is to degrade the French *bourgeoisie* and by implication the American middle class. These smug and sober capitalists were in fact decadent and corrupt. We know this because three not-very-nice ladies managed to cheat justice. What a book Martin could write on John Hinckley or Teddy Kennedy. □

Perceptibles

Howard Thurman: ***For the Inward Journey;*** Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

During his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, Jesse Jackson was widely praised for using the language of black evangelism. Wiser observers recognized that Jackson had actually degraded his inherited religious vocabulary by cutting it loose from its spiritual roots and putting it into the service of the politics of greed. The late Howard Thurman was another black preacher who sought to turn his black Christianity into something new. Studying under the Quaker mystic Rufus Jones and drawing inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore, he sought to reinterpret the relationship between Christianity and the Black experience in America within a more inclusive vision. Most Christians, black and white, will find some of his thought heretical, verging at times on pantheism. Dr. Thurman's probing reflections on love, hate, discipleship, race, suffering, and faith, however, do far transcend the paltry histrionics for which the Rev. Jackson was so extravagantly lauded. □

* * *

Robert V. Hine: ***California's Utopian Colonies;*** University of California; Berkeley.

Bishop Berkeley's observation that the course of empire was westward is particularly appropriate when the empire is Icaria, the Brotherhood of New Life, the Theosophical Colonies, or the Cooperative Commonwealth of Kaweah. The old joke—that everything not nailed down too tight ends up in California—was as true 100 years ago as it is today. Attracted by the climate, the frontier freedom, and the mystic aura of the Golden West, crackbrained religious and socialist sects of every description eventually set up shop in the place where it never rains. Robert Hine's now classic (1953) study documents the 17 utopian communities established in California between 1850 and 1950.

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This new edition contains a preface which provides a brief perspective on the communards of the 1960's as well as a bibliographical update on utopian studies since 1953.

It is small wonder if Hines, after devoting so much of his life to studying zanies, has lost sight of the distinction between normal and abnormal. He assesses the contribution made by utopian studies as "the continuous recall of utopian possibilities that they may someday become realizable," and adds, "God-speed for their journey!" God-speed, yes, and good riddance. □

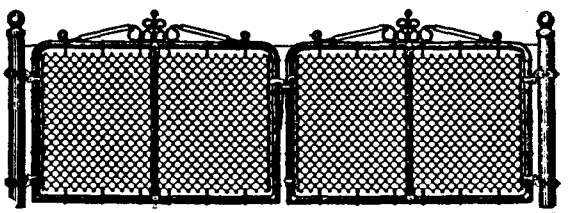
Waste of Money

Media MIA's

Vietnam Reconsidered: Lessons from a War; Edited by Harrison E. Salisbury; Harper & Row; New York.

James Dunkerley: ***The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador;*** Junction; London.

It has been a decade since America withdrew its troops from Vietnam. Unfortunately, scores of servicemen remain officially unaccounted for, their fate shrouded in the jungle mists of that distant land. Regrettably, hundreds of American journalists were also inexplicably lost during that conflict. We assume, perhaps mistakenly, that they are still alive because they continue to write and broadcast, but the wildly capricious and unreliable nature of most of their reports since early in the Vietnam War makes it clear that somehow they wandered into a wilderness of fantasy from which they have yet to escape. That they were captured and brainwashed by the enemy cannot be ruled out. These, after all, were the people who fostered the myth that the Vietcong were an indigenous force, who trumpeted every alleged American atrocity and skimmed lightly over wholesale butchery by the North Vietnamese, who romanticized the antiwar movement and demonized the military establishment, and finally who may have even decided the outcome of the war by misrepresenting triumph as defeat during Tet. Postwar scholarship by Lewy, Podhoretz, Lomperis, Braestrup, and others has demonstrated how far removed from reality American journalism was. More tragically, the reeducation camps, the slaughter and enslavement of thousands of "petty capitalists," the flight of the boat people, the Kampuchean genocide have all shown how little most correspondents, and the pacifists they glorified, ever understood the communist threat.



Vietnam Reconsidered, the proceedings of a four-day conference held at the University of Southern California, reveals that many of America's journalists have never extricated themselves from the "Vietnam" they fabricated. And though some nonjournalists participated in the conference, its chief organizer, Jack Langguth, was a Vietnam correspondent with a manifest preference for speakers who do not disturb journalistic illusions. Indeed, the newsmen who contributed to this collection have decided to blame the American government, especially Nixon and Kissinger, for all the lies circulated about the war, and they hysterically compare neoconservative critics of the press to Hitler and the fascists. Former antiwar activists, who were never anything without media support, also parade their moral purity in these pages, blaming America for everything that went wrong in Southeast Asia.

Speaking through the cracks, fortunately, are a few voices of sanity: a few speakers are so indiscreet as to note distortions in the usual media version of the war and its aftermath, and an unnamed Vietnamese speaker from the floor even challenges the antiwar movement's "grandiose ideals" as shams and asks why reporters are no longer interested in investigating suffering in Vietnam.

But then reporters are now too busy warning about "future Vietnams" in Central America to stop to assess the damage that their Vietnam mythology has already caused. Such a mythology, predictably, has its uses for leftist scholars such as James Dunkerley, who begins *The Long War* with yet another hackneyed comparison of El Salvador and Vietnam. Hardly an objective analyst, Dunkerley admits that his book is the product of "political conviction" and "outrage." Certainly, any humane observer will share Dunkerley's horror over the atrocities committed by right-wing death squads. But his uncritical allegiance to the left in Nicaragua and El Salvador is perilous. Just how perilous is best understood by millions of unphotographed, uninterviewed Vietnamese toiling on Siberian pipelines and imprisoned in tropical gulags. □

Power to the Professors

Richard Meisler: ***Trying Freedom: The Case for Liberating Education;*** Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

What a glorious time to be alive the 1960's and 70's were, if you happened to live on campus. Most college towns offered more varieties of entertainment than a sideshow: student demonstrators who closed down universities and went to the beach; desiccated faculty wives who divided their time between peace vigils and pottery workshops; and best of all, the thousand and one creative experiments in educational innovation. You couldn't drive through an Athens (Georgia, Ohio) or an Oxford (Mississippi, Ohio) without running into colleges without walls, alternative programs, and "new" colleges. Each of them had a different justification, a unique "goal-orientation," but all shared a commitment to *innovation* (there were even faculty seminars on strategies of innovation) and to student freedom.

Richard Meisler was in the thick of "all this juice and all this joy" as an undergraduate at Antioch, where he later taught in an experimental First Year Program, and at Buffalo State where he was in charge of the Individualized Degree Program. Meisler

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is not dismayed by the failure of both programs. He remains convinced that higher education, with its insistence on regimentation and numerical evaluation, succeeds only in turning out grade-grubbing automata and *Trying Freedom* is an inarticulate plea for student independence. By choosing their own course of study, contracting for projects and credit hours, students will be free to become mature and independent-minded seekers after truth.

Assume that an independent mind—rather than a virtuous and productive citizen—is the highest goal of an education. It is not at all clear how we are going to institutionalize freedom and creativity for the masses. Jefferson, a perennial optimist about the human race, supported a plan for public education in his native Virginia. With such a system, he predicted, "twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually," of which 10 would be sent to William and Mary. Even calculating for the incredible increase in population since Jefferson's time, the entire United States could not produce enough genuinely independent minds to occupy the talents of the Harvard faculty (to say nothing of Buffalo State).

Meisler is not interested in that kind of independence or creativity. His is a far more egalitarian ideal. He tells the students to respect their own culture, "the music you listen to . . . the books you enjoy, including comic books . . . and romances; the sports and other games you play; your dancing; your politics; your slang; your humor; your hobbies . . . your television programs. . . ." The students might just as well stay home and watch MTV. Besides, what sort of faculty members will find the time to direct the students in their personal search? Meisler's program included an English teacher who was a failure and who took refuge in performing manual labor; a feminist ABD in psychology who couldn't be distracted from her sex life long enough to keep appointments with students; finally, Meisler himself, who gave up his own field—philosophy—in favor of grant-swinging and bureaucratic hustling. Meisler defends the integrity of his program by saying that "there was less sex between IDP teachers and students than between teachers and students in conventional programs." On the other hand, he argues, "all sex between faculty and students is not manipulative and exploitative. Fine relationships between . . . faculty and student men and women, can begin on campus." It should be a great comfort to the parents of an 18-year-old female

student.

It is not that Meisler and his colleagues are all wrong. There is very little good that can be said today of American colleges. Professors are, by and large, boring and anti-intellectual. Higher education *is* a stultifying experience for most students. Grades *are* an expression of the faculty's feeble will to power. Meisler's solution is to concentrate more power in the hands of these same professors by bringing them into closer and more intimate contact with the students whose progress will be measured not by tests and grades but by the teachers' opinions and evaluations. The bad writing, unfocused discussions, and anecdotal approach of Meisler's books are all excellent arguments against giving any more power to the professoriat. □

Anthony Powell

(continued from page 4)

comforted. Hard work and honesty may remain. But it is more difficult to imagine what will become of those other, more delicate qualities: delight in a well-made verse, a graceful gesture, a sense of duty (as opposed to social obligation)—all those fragile things of which the sum is a civilization.

If *The Music of Time* series invites comparison with *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu,* Anthony Powell is even more frequently compared with his friend and contemporary, Evelyn Waugh. As a satirist, Waugh was a master of the grotesque and of an exaggerated overstatement which gives much of his work a slight air of the fantastic. Powell's novels, on the other hand, are marked by painstaking observation and understated irony and constitute a valuable chronicle of life in the mid-20th century. Of his own work, Powell has observed: "It is always difficult to know how human beings really live. If you describe it, you often appear to be a humorous writer, even if it is no more than mere reporting of exactly what has happened."

Powell's literary career did not end with the publication of *Hearing Secret Harmonies,* the last volume of the series. Between 1978 and 1982 he published the four volumes of memoirs, *Keep the Ball Rolling.* Written without rancor or sentimentality, these memoirs include brilliant portrayals of Powell's close friends and acquaintances—Waugh, Orwell, Graham Greene, Maurice Bowra—as well as memorable vignettes: Anthony Blunt (then in Military Intelligence) introducing him to Guy Burgess, "a BBC fairy of the fat go-getting sort"; lunch at a Hollywood studio with a surprisingly decent and well-mannered Scott Fitzgerald. Powell's most recent novel, *O How the Wheel Becomes It* (1983), is a gentle satire on the literary life.

As social commentaries, Powell's novels and memoirs must be ranked very high. In *The Music of Time* he takes the old theme of the artist's life and sets it in the practical and politicized world of the 20th century. Robert K. Morris, in a study of Powell, has referred to "the struggle between the man of will and the man of the imagination." Nick Jenkins, the novelist, and his friends—painters and musicians—are counterpointed against the maneuverings of political journalists and literary manipulators, above all against the career of the infamous Widmerpool, the self-created modern man. In Widmerpool, Powell has created one of the few archetypal characters of modern fiction: an unimaginative dullard without a trace of irony, who plods his way—step by step—to the top. When the social-climbing Widmerpool turns left and becomes a Labour MP, it is the most severe judgment which could be passed on the fate of that unfortunate party. Powell has been called a member of "the uncommitted right." Without espousing either party or platform, *The Music of Time* exposes

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the pretensions and posturings of the British Left to a gentle irony that is, in the long run, more withering than either Waugh's black humor or Muggeridge's blistering sarcasm. □

Russell Kirk

(continued from page 5)

State (B.A. 1940). There, as he relates in *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory* (1963), he "wrapped [his] poverty about [him] like a cloak, ate peanut butter and crackers with relish in [his] rooms, delighted in every privation . . . and was the Gissing of East Lansing." He continued his study first at Duke University, then, after military service during World War II, at St. Andrews University, where in 1952 he became the first American ever to earn Scotland's highest degree of letters. During his postwar years in Britain, Kirk further deepened his understanding of creative literature through friendship with T. S. Eliot, about whom he published a landmark critical study, *Eliot and His Age* (1972).

The brilliance of Kirk's work has compelled the national media and the academic community to give him some grudging recognition. But Kirk has attacked too many regnant principles not to have suffered the effects of what Leopold Tyrmand has called "the two-culture syndrome in America." Too often professedly broad-minded commentators and award committees have quietly passed over Dr. Kirk in favor of avant-garde conformists of less probity and intelligence. Certainly, it is not a fashionable thinker who sums up his *Weltanschauung* by invoking "the mind of Hawthorne":

> It is suspicious of change, skeptical of Progress, convinced of the terrible power of sin, in favor of human nature (flawed though it is) in its present state rather than some radical revision of human character upon a Utopian design; it is reverent toward the past, mindful of the universe as a realm of mystery, and cognizant that proliferating variety is the mark of a healthy society, while uniformity is decadence.

Beyond literature, though, Kirk's world view is rooted in Scripture and religious faith. "A society in which the religious impulse is forgotten or frustrated is sure to be, soon or late, a miserable domination." His own religious commitment came slowly, however. As a teenager, he was "a perfect mechanist and atheist." In college he became a Stoic. Finally, while training with the U.S. Chemical Warfare Service during World War II in the desolate but awe-inspiring Great Salt Lake Desert, he finally "began to perceive that pure reason has its frontiers" and to admit that religion might point the way beyond. "Once disbelief in a supernatural order [was] suspended," he relates, "evidences of every sort began to pour in . . . demonstrating that we are part of some grand and mysterious scheme, which works upon us through Providence."

Dr. Kirk has shared his rare literary gifts, his scholarly talents, and his religious convictions in many ways. He has lectured as a visiting professor at numerous universities and has personally tutored many students at his home in Mecosta, Michigan. A regular contributor to academic and popular journals throughout the United States and Europe, he has also founded two intellectual quarterlies, *The University Bookman* and *Modern Age*. Besides his classic *The Conservative Mind*, he has written more than 25 other books, including such important works as *John Randolph of Roanoke* (1951) and *Edmund Burke* (1967), major studies of seminal thinkers; *Enemies of the Permanent Things* (1969), a trenchant examination of destructive elements in modern literature; and *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning* (1979), an enlightening diagnosis of the problems besetting contemporary education. A creative writer as well as a scholar, Dr. Kirk has been called "the greatest living practitioner of the supernatural tale." He elevates the "creepy story" to metaphysical and theological proportions in a way that makes him worthy of comparison with Charles Williams and Walter De la Mare. His most recent collections are *The Princess of All Lands* (1979) and *Watchers at the Strait Gate* (1984).

Despite all of his literary and scholarly attainments, Dr. Kirk remains an unassuming man who is "best content when planting . . . trees at Mecosta." "To plant a tree," he explains, "in our age, when the expectation of change commonly seems greater than the expectation of continuity, is an act of faith." Deep-rooted and growing, the results of Dr. Kirk's acts of faith may be found far beyond Michigan. □

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Notables

Being Potent

Power, many people believe, is something that can always be quantified. It can be, when it is a question of things like hand tools and solar bodies. But it is far from being the case when it comes to human relationships. For millennia the power play between the sexes has proceeded without remission. It *seems* that men have the upper hand in all things that can be measured. Women, at least a vocal minority, feel repressed, and are demanding what they perceive to be their due—the freedom to enter politics or fly on the space shuttle. But while these women are vying for what they think is equal power, they are busy losing that intangible force that they have held over men from the start. Since the universe tends toward a state of equilibrium, gains always entail losses. As women achieve the physical, they lose something of the metaphysical. Their true power is given up for trappings. And this is the state of affairs Louis Auchincloss outlines in *The Book Class* (Houghton Mifflin; Boston).

Auchincloss's slender novel accurately reflects the manners of our historical moment. It is both far- and deep-sighted. He probes the meager ideas that occupy our current sociocultural scene with honesty and clarity. *The Book Class* poses an unequivocal question: How did it happen that women, who have accumulated such moral and material profits from the four millennia of Western civilization, are now engaged in squandering their assets and investments? Why do they endorse the feminist manifesto: *We want it all*—no matter what the price. It's feasible, and let's do it!

But is it feasible? After they succeed in destroying or subjugating the male sex, who will be the next to face the feminist fury? Children? Animals? Maybe plants? An absurd suggestion, but hardly more absurd than the rabidity of feminist dialectics and rhetoric. Which make it clear that someone/something *must* be next. Mr. Auchincloss's novel is an apt compendium of these forebodings. □

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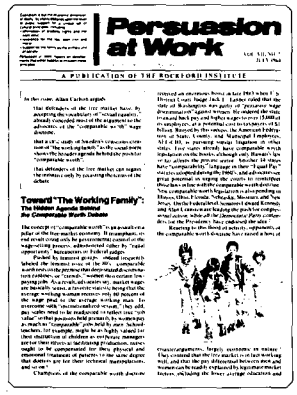
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Seeing Red

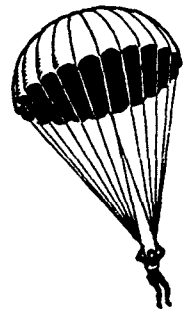
***Red Dawn;* Directed by John Milius; Written by John Milius and Kevin Reynolds; MGM-UA Entertainment.**

by C. P. Dragash

There is a common daydream among men who grew up in the years between the Berlin blockade and the Cuban missile crisis: the Russians have invaded the American heartland, and a dedicated band of teenage boys conduct an heroic partisan war against the ruthless occupation forces. For most of them it remained a daydream, at best an unfinished novel. It was inevitable that someone in Hollywood would turn his private fantasy into the public reality of celluloid.

In *Red Dawn* a band of frightened teenagers is slowly turned into a crack fighting force that succeeds, somewhat improbably, in harrassing the Russian and Cuban hordes who have occupied most of Colorado. John Milius, who wrote and directed the movie, describes himself as a zen anarchist and NRA fanatic. *Red Dawn* is already being reviled for its "mastadon machismo" and "fascist fantasies," for "right wing paranoia" and "German—forget zen—fascism." The movie does, in fact, sing the praises of toughness; it does celebrate the paleolithic pleasures of small-town America: the kids know how to ride, shoot, and stay alive in the wilderness. Now that the Boy Scouts do social work, all this woodcraft must seem bizarre to city boys. Yet in many parts of this land, drinking deer's blood is not—as they may think in New York—a kinky survivalist ritual but an initiation rite for a boy who's got his first buck. The really unpardonable crime of the film is not that the young partisans shoot deer: they actually shoot Russians—a clear violation of the visitors' civil rights. Eventually they are forced to shoot one of their own members, the student-body president who has betrayed them (Milius doesn't like politicians). When the young resistance leader is asked to explain what makes them so different from the invaders, his only answer is "We live here"—an obviously fascist blasphemy against the spirit of internationalism.

Where is it we live, in the vision of John Milius? The reviewers have summed it up as either militant patriotism or a cheap exploitation of the American love of violence. The film is, in fact, remarkably free of ideology but what it does offer is a glimpse of an America that still exists, although not in commuting distance from Manhattan and L.A. It is a small-town nation, complete with main street, public park, and white-painted churches, where fathers take their sons hunting and fishing and where children, even running for their lives, think first of their families and of home. The partisan leader who urges his followers to turn



their grief into "something else" cannot keep back his own tears when he looks at a photograph of himself and his younger brother as small children. In the end the brothers, wounded in a hopeless assault on the enemy, make their way to the playground and die in each other's arms.

Red Dawn, despite its virtues, is built upon an absurd premise. The explanation of how we came to fight a conventional war on our own soil would not satisfy even an Ian Fleming or the creators of *The Spike.* None of the characters is developed to the point of being a recognizable stereotype (on the other hand, what teenage kid is a real person?). Worst of all, Milius's own libertarian code of toughness and independence weakens the social impact. When the resistance leader refuses to join the regular army in the big war, you get the feeling that Milius approves of patriotism in the abstract because real men are patriotic. To this extent his teenage guerrillas are less like partisans and more like feuding anarchists.

It used to be questioned whether or not a Christian could write a tragedy. After all, the Christian view of life (and history) seems to presuppose a happy ending. One thing is clear, there can be no such thing as an anarchist or libertarian tragedy. Tragedy requires heroism—a risk of self in behalf of something greater: family, community, divine will. Rootless individualism can never be heroic—heroism implies sacrifice—only strenuous. To the extent that the heroes of *Red Dawn* manage to transcend their creator's "zanarchism," they engage our interest.

This is a film which could not have been made in the 60's or 70's. The effects are hard to calculate. It may be only a flash in the pan or the beginning of a trend, although it will be hard for Hollywood to resist the evidence of over $8 million in ticket sales in one weekend. Even a little reality can be dangerous to the health of political illusions. In an election year when the conciliatory platitudes of George Kennan are being mouthed by Walter Mondale, the millions of Americans who will have seen *Red Dawn* before November 6 may not be in any mood to roll over and play dead. □

Mr. Dragash defends lost causes from his ivory tower in New Rome.

Tilt

***Koyaanisqatsi;* Directed by Godfrey Reggio; Island Alive/New Cinema.**

by Stephen Macaulay

As *Koyaanisqatsi* continues to make its way across the land, it's worth asking whether, as the title of Mr. Reggio's film has it, life is "out of balance." (The title,

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incidentally, is a Hopi Indian word; only Hopis and members of the chorus that composer Philip Glass employed for dirge-like punctuation in the soundtrack can pronounce it, I think.) Mr. Reggio opens the film with travelogue shots that show the splendor of Nature: deserts, buttes, rock formations, canyons, etc. These scenes are, eventually, contrasted with what Man has wrought: oil refineries, freeways, housing projects, and Las Vegas. Now if that is all that could be placed on the scales, then civilization would come out the big loser and one could, as the titles at the end of the film imply, expect the "Day of Putrefaction" sometime early next week.

But is life, even in Nature, ever in balance? No. There is always and everywhere a vector that causes things to change: those cathedral-like rock formations, for example, were once not so delicately shaped; those who like more brute forms might see the spires as destruction of a more basic design. Rivers rip rock into canyons. And so on. The work of man is not always in the best of taste but for my money an oil refinery beats an earthquake or a flood every time. □

horribly gruesome!" The "PG" rating was said to be too lenient. Steven Spielberg's public announcement that he wouldn't permit his young children, if he had any, to see one sequence in the *Temple of Doom* didn't provoke silence. Several points should be considered. Is it possible that fully mature and legally responsible members of our society can find enjoyment in a movie which fails to exhibit bare skin and dirty language, or is such enjoyment limited only to junior members?

Indiana Jones is hardly the sort of character who could be found on Saturday morning cartoon shows or in boys' adventure stories. A better parallel can be found on the covers of the pulp magazines of the 1930's, on which the muscles of the hero ripple and the breasts of the damsel heave. After *Raiders,* should anyone be surprised? It was not a gentle film: melting faces are somehow not the same thing as Bambi in a forest fire. Yet that cinematic parallel is implicit in the criticisms raised against the *Temple of Doom.*

The rating system, while it might have some merits, should not have the power, or effect, that it does. Too many parents are willing to surrender their responsibility to the anonymous forces found in Hollywood who determine the ratings. Most people recognize that the horoscope columns that run in daily newspapers are rather silly: as if the population of the planet can be divided into 12 groups. Unfortunately, many of those same people imagine that a little group of cinematic swamis can divide all of the feature films released into four groups. Sometimes, people have to make up their own minds; they must cease relying on others.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom does have generous dollops of violence and even a touch of "spice" in the form of sexual innuendo. But this is no chainsaw massacre nor a case of glands unchained. The opening sequence uses Cole Porter's "Anything Goes" as the score, but the *anything* isn't *everything;* Spielberg has taste. Mature adult taste: responsible but not stultified. He recognizes that there is a child in all of us—or at least *most* of us. □

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

The Age of Responsibility

***Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom;* Directed by Steven Spielberg; Screenplay by Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz; Story by George Lucas; Paramount Pictures.**

Raiders of the Lost Ark, as everybody knows, was a wildly successful film. For some reason, it is thought of as a children's movie; adults attend only in the company of children. That is nonsense, of course, for the situation could be reversed. However, the child orientation has caused *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* to be met with cries of dismay: "It's too violent for children, too

Politics and Prayer

One of the high points of this fall's campaign season was the vigorous debate over the place of religion in America's public life. In retrospect, it may some day be regarded as the most meaningful public discussion of the question in this century. The exchange began early in the campaign when President Reagan asserted in a Dallas prayer breakfast that politics and religion are "necessarily related" and later, in an American Legion speech in Salt Lake City, attacked "antireligionists" for trying "to twist the concept of freedom of religion to mean freedom against religion." Walter Mondale responded in a B'nai B'rith speech in Washington by accusing Reagan of violating the constitutional separation of Church and state by supporting school prayer and of thereby asking "the state to enforce the religious life of our people." Religious attitudes toward abortion were soon added to the agenda, as Senator Kennedy, Governor Cuomo, Geraldine Ferraro, Archbishop O'Connor, Moral Majority, and many others joined in the fray. Handicapped by a stunted religious sensibility, the national media often lapsed into threadbare clichés, denouncing the New Right effort to "impose" religious views on the nation. Fortunately, some media outlets moved beyond these deceptive platitudes by seeking understanding from more qualified observers, including Richard John Neuhaus, Lutheran pastor and director of The Rockford Institute's

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Center on Religion & Society in New York. In interviews with *Newsweek, Time, Nightline,* and others, Pastor Neuhaus explained why the concept of secular America is historically and sociologically false and why religious convictions *should* be part of the country's political dialogue. "The present confusion," he explained, "... *can* turn out to be a watershed moment in American political and cultural life if we begin to reconstruct a public philosophy, one that is responsible to, and in conversation with, the religious-based values of the American people." Much discussed, Pastor Neuhaus's book *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* also helped to define the terms of the Church-state debate. (Further discussion of this work will appear in future issues of *Chronicles.*)

Unfortunately, the political leaders involved in the debate abandoned it before some central issues were addressed. Fairly early, Reagan's aides urged him to drop the subject, while Mondale's advisers likewise steered their candidate away from the topic. In part, prudential considerations dictated the abbreviation of the debate. Reagan's camp believed it already had the religious vote sewn up and did not want to alienate other constituencies. Mondale strategists on the other hand were worried about sagging support among Southern Protestants. But beyond these calculations lay a more fundamental barrier to prolonged discussion of religion in modern electoral politics.

"Religion," Santayana observed, "is the enjoyment of life in the consciousness of impotence." Contemporary politicians are all for the enjoyment of life. Their slogans invariably promise more and more of it. Consciousness of human impotence is another matter. A sense of human contingency and sinfulness has always been at the center of a religious sensibility, yet such themes rarely surface in American life today. When during a rare moment of clarity President Carter rashly suggested that Americans might be suffering from a "malaise of spirit," his popularity tumbled overnight. Voters perpetually reminded how great they are and how much greater their leaders can make them could not stand for such talk. Even most churches now softpedal religion's humbling themes in favor of homilies less likely to threaten their parishioners' tender self-esteem. The social gospel or positive thinking provides safer texts.

But besides being perilous to the soul, the absence of any public sense of human finitude makes for self-destructive politics. Voters become unrealistically utopian in their expectations and politicians become Promethean in their attitudes. Too many political leaders are already like the one of whom Winston Churchill remarked, "There but for the grace of God goes God." They claim the keys to making everyone affluent, healthy, and comfortable, to securing international peace, to eliminating prejudice and inequality, and even to putting mankind into the heavens. Once in office, these leaders invariably display their mortal limits by failing to deliver on their inflated pledges. The result is often despair and cynicism among the electorate.

In a remarkably candid letter, Karl Marx once admitted that anyone who pondered on human contingency must concede the existence of God and that therefore "this question is forbidden to socialist man." For too long, this question has been tacitly forbidden to American men and women as well. No one expects the appearance of "Humility Now!" as a campaign slogan. But America would be a healthier country if all those engaged in winning "grass-roots" support for their political policies knew, with Isaiah, that "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth ... surely the people is grass." □

Fame: I'm Going to Live Forever

The death of Truman Capote at the early age of 59 raises some questions about the career of the artist in our time. By now we are used to the spectacle of creative talent destroying itself for public amusement. Janice Joplin, Jim Morrison, and Jimi Hendrix—we thought of them as heroic victims of their excesses in the great tradition of Dylan Thomas and Brendan Behan. Most recently, comics like John Belushi and

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Andy Kaufman, writers like Tennessee Williams and Capote, actors like William Holden and Richard Burton—all have gone to wherever it is that guests on the *Tonight Show* go. You could make a movie, *Someone is Killing the Celebrities of America,* in which it turned out that a fired editor of *People* magazine was getting revenge on his former employers by destroying their material.

Of course, no one is actually murdering them, if we exclude drugs, booze, and the devil as possible agents. They did it to themselves, but why? Apart from all the arguments you can make—the decadence of our society, the hollowness of its values, our habit of celebrating the second-rate and insecure—there is still the nagging feeling that these people are, in a sense, victims of their celebrity. Since the days of P. T. Barnum, the American public has had an appetite for sensations. A man writes a reasonable book or a decent play and before too long finds himself talking to Johnny and Phil in front of millions of viewers. He gets used to seeing his picture in *Time* and his name in the papers. He becomes a celebrity, and that is his undoing. He no longer has to write good books—he just has to sell them. Above all, he has to stay in the public eye. But eventually the public gets tired. If the Second Coming took place on the Letterman show, it would boost the ratings for a week and then be forgotten—replaced by a new starlet on *Dallas* or a *Sex Diet for Cats* book.

Capote's case is all too typical. In his youth he wrote some almost first-rate short stories, two pretty good novels. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was made into a successful movie. Before long, Capote started talking about the contest between himself and Norman Mailer—which would emerge as the greatest postwar American writer? The comparison was revealing. In his long and embarrassing career, Mailer has written one good novel, his first. What he has achieved is a triumph of the will, the conversion of a second-rate James Jones into a stage Irishman, an American Behan, a Jewish Jimmy Breslin. His talent for self-promotion would have made him a fortune on Madison Avenue or in Hollywood. No matter how much Capote camped it up at parties of the rich and famous or dripped out his venomous little apothegms, he could never equal

Mailer's performance or his success. For one thing, he had too much taste. It prevented him from turning out, year after dismal year, the thousands of pages which Mailer calls books. Then too, Capote's deviate chic did not wear so well over the years as Mailer's would-be machismo. Fifty years ago, Capote would have become a man of letters. He would have composed essays on old books, written introductions, published his correspondence. Instead, he pursued his dream of celebrity, a dream which turned out to be a succubus that drained him of his talent, his principles, and in the end his life. □

Center for Christian Studies

As a late-20th-century proposition, ecumenism has its good and its bad sides. On the bad side, "ecumenism" is often simply a euphemism masking the collapse of faith. When no one believes in the creeds anymore, why not ignore the differences and join together? Indeed, it is hard not to see such ecumenism, for instance, in the willingness of many mainline Protestants to share communion with virtually anyone, no questions asked.

But on the other hand, ecumenism may develop as a fruitful effort by devout believers to listen to the religious positions of others and to share what can be shared, while still recognizing where doctrinal convictions and ecclesiastical loyalties diverge. The Center for Christian Studies, headquartered in Notre Dame, gives promise of ecumenism of the better sort. Dedicated "to the investigation of the interaction of Christianity and modernity," this center and its publication, *Center Journal,* foster serious dialogue among men and women from many parts of the Christian spectrum. Here leading Catholic scholars such as Gerhart Niemeyer and Ralph McInerny explore issues with leading Protestant thinkers, such as George Marsden and Richard John Neuhaus, director of The Rockford Institute's Center on Religion & Society in New York. Agreement on all issues is not to be expected, but, as Pastor Neuhaus so often reminds us, informed disagreement is itself an achievement. □

JOURNALISM

From Russia with Love

During the 1920's and 30's, restless American progressives—"political pilgrims" in Paul Hollander's phrase—returned from their obligatory hajj to Moscow lauding the Soviet regime and indicting the hopelessly inferior American order. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the Berlin Wall, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Solzhenitsyn, Afghanistan, and KAL 007, almost no one is heedless enough to assert the superiority of the Russian government over our own. Instead, the gentlemen of the Left now returning from the Land of Lenin claim to have found the mirror image of a seriously flawed America.

The latest version of this equation was presented recently in the pages of *The New Yorker* by John Kenneth Galbraith. Reflecting on his four visits to the Soviet

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LIBERAL CULTURE

Liberal Culture

American liberalism has come a long way in 150 years—from Emerson down to one Susan Steward, a syndicated gossip columnist. Here's a sample of *her* ethical canon, as promulgated by the Detroit *Free Press*:

> A major pregnant-celebrity trend is shaping up. In the old days, like last year, pregnant actresses were almost never married, and many of them admitted only a vague curiosity about the identity of their children's fathers. Most of today's mothers-to-be are actually married to the fathers of their forthcoming children.

Then comes *cri de coeur* of the neosanctimony:

> Why this new Victorianism?

Followed by the *de profundis* of the neobigotry:

> What is next?

Union over the past 25 years, this celebrated economist concludes that comparison of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. reveals that "neither capitalism nor socialism can be said to be working so very well." More specifically, Professor Galbraith asserts that both the Soviet Union and America are finding it difficult to carry "the formidable burden" of a "modern consumer-oriented economy." Galbraith admits that the Soviet Union's economy has defects, but "one wonders not that it has major areas of failure but that it works as well as it does." The cause of the long lines in Leningrad stores, he further avers, is simply American-style inflation, not any real lack of consumer goods. The Soviet Union, he also suggests, exerts no direct economic control over its Eastern European neighbors, no more at least than America does over Canada or Mexico. Conceding that overcentralization and the lack of immigrant agricultural labor causes some hardships not felt by Americans, he urges us not to

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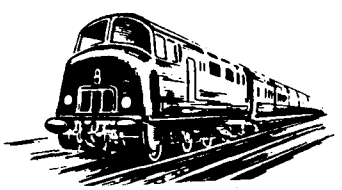
forget the counter benefits of "much cleaner" streets, lower crime rates, and "far more efficient" public transportation than is found here.

As much as Soviet leaders rail against the iniquities of American capitalism, the reader suspects that they are actually quite pleased to have a Harvard scholar equate their problems with those of the U.S. In framing the comparison Galbraith comes dangerously close to the official party line. His aim in offering this analysis of the superpowers is "to contribute a little to the understanding and confidence that are essential before real progress on arms reduction is possible." A survey of the *un*official views of millions of average Russians and Russian-dominated peoples, however, would reveal that Galbraith has fostered dangerous misunderstanding and false confidence. For the U.S.S.R. is a land beset with radically un-American woes.

To begin with, when told that he waits hours in line to get a couple bars of inferior soap not because there is a shortage of soap but because there is an oversupply of money, the average Russian factory worker would laugh in Mr. Galbraith's well-meaning face. A Russian housewife who has for years endured bare shelves and long May Day parades would hoot at the idea that she lives in a "consumer-oriented economy." The suggestion that Russia does not control the Polish economy would meet with even more bitter derision from Solidarity members. The streets are clean, every Russian knows, because paper is far too scarce to litter. But millions of innocent Soviet citizens who



have ridden the rails to forced labor camps in Siberia could confirm Mr. Galbraith's report concerning public transportation: like Mussolini's, communist trains are always on schedule. □

Notables

Density

Recently, while visiting an affluent suburb (one of those neighborhoods where all of the inhabitants seem to be urban professionals, even those in designer diapers), we picked up a copy of *Livia,* which is the second novel in Lawrence Durrell's *The Avignon Quintet,* of which *Sebastian or Ruling Passions* (Viking Press; New York), his most recent novel, is the fourth. The clerk at the bookstore was wearing a Hawaiian shirt, khaki shorts, Top Siders, and Ray Ban sunglasses on the obligatory string that is usually associated with ancient librarians. As the clerk rang up *Livia,* he could not help exclaiming: "Awwwright! Let's hear it for Lawrence Durrell! There's a picture of him and Henry Miller. In bed. Two old men. Reading something—I don't know what. It's so . . . Nice!" We felt a pinch of pity for the young man behind the counter: he obviously imagined that he knew the essence of *something.* We felt more sorrow for Durrell, who is simply misunderstood by clerks and critics alike. Nowadays, his novels receive little more than a nod of acknowledgment from reviewers whose only qualification is that they once read, they seem to remember, *Justine* . . . or did they only see the movie?

Durrell creates systems. Any reader coming to *Sebastian* without the preceding books will find himself among dramatis personae who are acting in ways that are unusual by most standards, but which are consistent with their character. No part of Durrell's work can be understood in isolation: the whole of his

creation must first be assimilated. Durrell is a dangerous writer. His works do not belong in the hands of fools or children. They have an unearned reputation for being somehow pornographic. They should be reserved for the strong-hearted few who can face such a challenge and learn to enjoy one of the few writers who is truly a novelist in the grandest sense of the word. □

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